BEMUSING MAGAZINE

15p | 14 JULY

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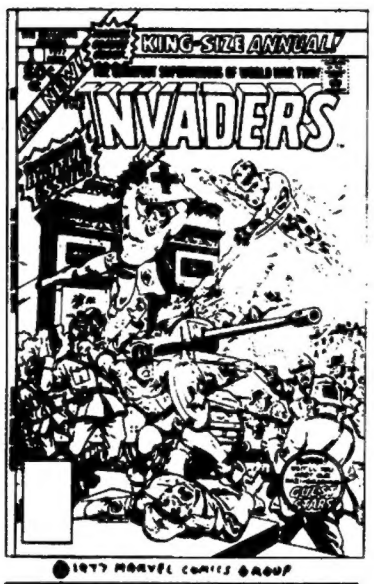
COMICS NEWS

BEMUSING

MAGAZINE



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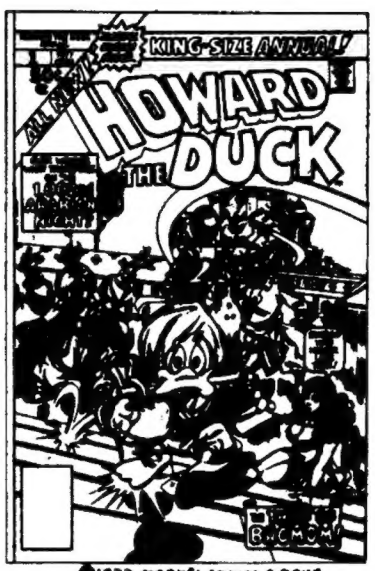

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THE COMIC REVIEW

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BEMUSING MAGAZINE ≠14

July 1977

editor: Martin Lock
aide: Nige Edwards

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BEMUSINGS

I mentioned the EAGLE AWARDS last time; well, the second, voting ballot is now available --I came across a copy in Dark They Were & Golden Eyed, but if you can't find one, send an s.a.e. to 52 Roydene Rd, Plumstead, London SE18 1QA. There are few surprises, though I do wish more than the top three nominations in a category had been included; what did really shock me was that I'm down in "Favourite British Fan Personality" between Colin Campbell and Dez Skinn, and also in "Favourite British comics writer", along with Chris Claremont and Peter O'Donnell. Getting into that distinguished company's made my year! I'd like to thank everyone who gave me their nominations--and if you vote "pass" in either category I'll never speak to you again, so there!

Mention of "Dark They Were" reminds me--have you read the interview with its owner, Bram Stokes, in issue 1 of KIDZ STUFF? They can interview him in every issue, as far as I'm concerned. The shop he has built up is the shop for comics and fantasy--it's worth a visit, however far away you are.

In case you've wondered what Howard the Duck thinks of our own Stangroom the Woodpecker, Chris Ash gives us a candid illo of a discussion ("rather like a pillow fight without the pillows") between the two; more we should want?

There'll be a logo change for the next Bem, due out in time for Comicon 77; and hopefully one or two errant columnists will be on hand then, too! Now, if I can just find room for them...

-Martin

ART CREDITS:
Chris Ash: 2 (upper), 4, 9 (strip)
Marc Baines: 8 (strip)
Dave Byrom: 16 (strip)
Greg Chown: 11 (pencils), 16 (upper)
Philip Elliott: 10
Steve Gibson: 5 (pencils, lower)
Joe Matthews: 7
John Matthews: 5 (inks, lower)
Harry McAvinchey: 6 (all)
Roger McBroom: 15 (left)
Terry M. Moore: 2 (lower), 14 (strip)
Nick Neocleous: 14, 15 (right)
Laurence Piper: 8 (upper)
Superswipe: 1, 11 (inks)
Mercy Van Vlack: 12
Al Walker: 5 (upper)

BEM BACK ISSUES!

Postal rates may have escalated, but all 12 available back issues (Bems 1, 3, and 6-13, Summer Comics Special ≠1, and Nige's N-Zine ≠1) can still be had for a mere £1 -- while they last -- or any 7 for 80p! If you missed Bem-12, featuring Nige Edwards interviewing Howard the Duck, plus all the regulars, we will wing you a copy for 15p, post free...

TALE-ENDERS

Rather less space than usual for this particular column -- so let's start right away, among the August Marvels, with STAR WARS ≠2, which looks as if it's growing into a grand space opera of the "Planet Stories" school; Steve Leialoha, inking & colouring, does a lot for Howie Chaykin's pencils, and when you add a Roy Thomas script, you've got some pretty fine work. 18 pages, too! Which kind of makes up for the 16 pages in TARZAN ≠3, in which Roy T and John B are joined by Tony deZuniga as embellisher -- "The Altar of the Flaming God" continues the adaptation of "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar", with La of Opar making her entrance, and Tarzan losing his memory; the story's picking up pace now, and getting interesting. I still prefer JOHN CARTER of the two ERB books, though; issue 3, with the unusual artistic effect of Rudy Nebres building on and inking Gil Kane's pencils, is a nice addition to any collection--the script is limited by the fact that our hero is a chained captive throughout, but Marv Wolfman makes it all engrossing. That's 16 pages -- 4 illos of Barsoom by Alex Nino fill the other art page very adequately.

Another of Marvelous Marv's titles is, of course, TOMB OF DRACULA; ≠59 concludes the "Son of Dracula" story with a death, swift retribution, an uneasy truce -- and salvation denied. Marv, Gene & Tom have excelled themselves once again -- but how do you call this a "comic" book?

MARVEL TEAM-UP ≠60 is the second half of the battle with Equinox, as Spider-Man and the Wasp fight to avenge the "death" of Hank Pym--nicely done, Chris & John.

"Snowfire", by the same team of Chris Claremont & John Byrne, inked this time by Dan Green, is the last issue but one of IRON FIST (≠14); he will be missed. But if he's to guest in a Team-Up two-parter, and then take up "permanent" residence in POWER MAN of all places, things could be worse. The usual standard of John Byrne art, this time--how anyone this good can work so fast I don't know.

MASTER OF KUNG FU ≠55 has another Paul Gulacy cover -- shattering! Inside, the Deadline Doom is dodged by a rush job by Mike Zeck, inked by Jim Mooney -- back to the "War-yore" series next time. MS MARVEL ≠8 continues Chris Claremont's efforts to change Conway's concept into an intriguing series--Mooney & Sinnott on art here for the final battle with Grotesk.

ETERNALS ≠14 has Ikaris "face-to-face against the cosmic-powered Hulk"--not the genuine Incredible One, just a robot that gets hit by cosmic energy. Strange...

HERCULES UNBOUND ≠12 brings the series to a satisfactorily rounded conclusion, leaving three regular members of the cast to stroll off into the dusk, as Herc's long imprisonment is explained--and one of his companions revealed to be not at all what he seemed to be, courtesy of Cary Bates & Walt Simonson. You'll be surprised!

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ≠145, by Steve Englehart, Dick Dillin & Frank McLaughlin, is a real weirdie--"The Carnival of Souls" is the title, and the black magic of Count Crystal manages to kill Superman early on --but, Supes is one ghost the nether world finds it hard to keep! Hawkgirl and the Phantom Stranger are in the thick of the action -- all in all, 33 pages are filled most engrossingly, to end on the return of... Ah no, that would be telling...

HOUSE OF SECRETS ≠147 features a tale by David Michelinie & Alex Nino, "The See-Through Thief"; TEEN TITANS ≠49 has the first set of skate-boarding bad-guys I've seen (though someone was kind enough to tell me that Doug Moench has devised a hero called "The Concrete Crusader" for a skate-boarding magazine); and BATMAN ≠290 concludes a David V. Reed two-parter. But the Mike Grell art is poor, uninspired--do we blame inker Vince Colletta, or can Mike just not be bothered these days?

STARFIRE ≠7 is the penultimate issue--we may have had just about every writer this side of Smilin' Stan on the book, but at least the art, by Mike Vosburg & Vince Colletta, has remained consistent. This issue concludes Steve Englehart's 2-issue tenure, well up to the standards of the previous scripters--but it's sad if this is yet another in the long line of failed heroine books. Where did they go wrong?

Lastly, on a happier note, let's welcome the King of the Sea back to his own book --AQUAMAN ≠57, September. He's after the fellow who murdered his son last month in ADVENTURE, Black Manta, which is a hell of a way to re-start. That's all, folks! -ML

NEWS

Marvel are going up to 35c & 60c, by November cover-dates at the latest. In this country, it probably means that, since the exchange rate would put a 35c comic at over 20p, we can expect a 15p price-tag soon from both World and Gold.

Both Marv Wolfman and Archie Goodwin are working on projects for MARVEL PREVIEW; Archie's is tentatively titled "Warriors Of Eternity".

Jack Kirby's last issue of CAPTAIN AMERICA should be ≠215, cover-dated November -- after this, Roy Thomas and Al Milgrom are to take over.

2001 is cancelled after ≠10, September.

Doug Moench has written the script for THE DEEP, a 60 cent one-shot based on the Peter Benchley book/film; it's to be pencilled by Carmine Infantino and inked in the Philippines.

John Byrne is pencilling THE AVENGERS ≠166, and taking over POWER MAN (with ≠48) and X-MEN (with ≠108)--Dave Cockrum is to spend more time in his rôle as Assistant Art Director, and preparing some new projects.

THE CHAMPIONS will guest star in GODZILLA ≠3, as Godzilla eats Pittsburgh. In their own title, expect to see soon Magneto and some evil mutants, Dr Doom, the Sentinels, Ares, and also Jack of Hearts!

Ghost Rider pops up in HUMAN FLY ≠2, pencilled by Carmine Infantino, whose stint on NOVA begins with ≠15. Because Frank Giacoia was ill, NOVA ≠13 was inked by Joe Sinnott, and ≠14 by Dick Giordano.

To help out the ailing Gil Kane, Ross Andru is drawing a fill-in issue of JOHN CARTER, to be inked by Rudy Nebres.

Sal Buscema is to draw the JOHN CARTER ANNUAL; written by Marv Wolfman, it's an adaptation of "The Ancient Dead" by ERB. Sal, inked by Klaus Janson, is also drawing THOR ANNUAL; the FF ANNUAL is now being written by Marv Wolfman, who is now to take charge of SPIDER-WOMAN, due out in late summer.

On DEFENDERS, an issue to be scripted by Chris Claremont is to guest-star Ms Marvel -- Dave Kraft & Ed Hannigan are doing a 2-parter re-introducing Devil Slayer, and bringing Dr Strange back to the group.

Al Milgrom is working on a fill-in issue of HULK featuring the return of Dragon Man

WHAT IF ≠5 is "What If Cap & Bucky had survived World War 2" by Don Glut & Roy Thomas, drawn by George Tuska & Don Perlin.

Stan Lee & Jack Kirby's new SILVER SURFER book is due out in time for Christmas.

The HOWARD THE DUCK newspaper strip began on June 6, by Steve Gerber (who got a write-up in the June PLAYBOY) & Gene Colan --TOMB OF DRACULA is now down, to bimonthly. The CONAN strip is scheduled for next January.

The next four MARVEL CLASSICS are "White Fang", "First Men In the Moon", "The Man In the Iron Mask", and "Captain Blood".

"Weirdworld" by Moench, Ploog and Nino will appear in MARVEL PREMIERE ≠38.

Roguish Roger Slifer is now editor of Marvel's few remaining black & white magazines.

Appearing in future issues of FF will be the X-Men, Molecule Man, and Klaw, while Ringmaster and Will-O'-The-Wisp are due to meet HULK shortly, and MARVEL TEAM-UP will be bringing back the Man-Thing. Look out for the Destroyer in THOR soon, too.

Following Len Wein as CAPTAIN BRITAIN scripter will be Jim Lawrence, who wrote Dr Strange once upon a time -- in STRANGE TALES 162-166, yet!

An adaptation is still being discussed of "Jabberwocky"--it may well be a colour one-shot.

RAGMAN is cancelled with ≠5, KUNG FU FIGHTER with ≠18, ISIS with ≠8, PLASTIC MAN with ≠20, and STARFIRE with ≠8. WITCHING HOUR goes monthly with ≠76, and GHOSTS with ≠59.

Because of postal and customs regulations the DC annuals we listed last time will instead be called SPECIALs if they're 60c, or SPECTACULARs if they're Dollar Comics--they won't show a number on the cover.

KARATE KID is changing its emphasis from martial arts to superheroics--Jack Harris wrote ≠11, Paul Levitz will be doing ≠12 and ≠13.

Superman guest-stars in BLACK LIGHTNING ≠4 and ≠5.

DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE is a new gothic suspense title -- David Michelinie has written a book-length origin for the narrator, Madame Xanadu, and ≠1 will have a cover & splash drawn by Mike Kaluta.

LIMITED COLLECTORS' EDITION is changing its name to ALL-NEW COLLECTORS' EDITION.

Sal Amendola has drawn the GREEN ARROW and BLACK CANARY strips in WORLD'S FINEST ≠247, with Trevor Von Eeden taking over from ≠248 on. Issue 250 is to feature a 56-page story in which Black Canary, accompanied by Green Arrow, Superman and Batman, attempts to visit Earth II--they end up in 1943, where they meet Wonder Woman. Gerry Conway wrote it; a Steve Ditko CREEPER story completes the mag. In a future WF, Wonder Woman is to meet Mlle Marie.

Mike Grell is leaving BATMAN, to keep up GREEN LANTERN's now monthly schedule. He's giving WARLORD a new costume soon.

To tie in with the Superman Movie, SHOWCASE ≠101-103 or 104-106 will feature Jor-El in WORLD OF KRYPTON.

Neal Adams & Mike Nasser are creating a supernatural superhero for DC--if it's approved, it will be a bi-monthly book, scripted by Adams.

Rich Buckler is pencilling THE NEW GODS ≠15.

"The Star Tsar" will battle the JLA for 3 issues. WEIRD WAR ≠60 is a book-length story by Steve Englehart.

Gerry Conway has scripted a new series about a bionic GI--SUPER SOLDIER, no less!

Swamp Thing, Deadman and Rip Hunter will be guesting in ≠83 to 85 of CHALLENGERS.

Bob Rozakis is writing the first 3 SUPERBOY stories for ADVENTURE (≠453-5)--after that David Michelinie takes over.

After the current multi-part story revolving around the Atom, a similar series involving the Martian Manhunter is to start in SUPER-TEAM FAMILY; following his treatment of her there, Al Weiss is taking over the art on SUPERGIRL in SUPERMAN FAMILY. The Maid of Might will battle Klax-Ar, and Fred Danvers will join S.T.A.R. labs. Issues 196 and 197 contain a SUPERMAN 2-parter by Conway & Swan, where the Man of Steel meets his Earth II counterpart.

Mazdan, the Time Exile (from SHOWCASE ≠4!) will reappear in THE FLASH soon -- see FLASH 215 for a reprint of that expensive original story.

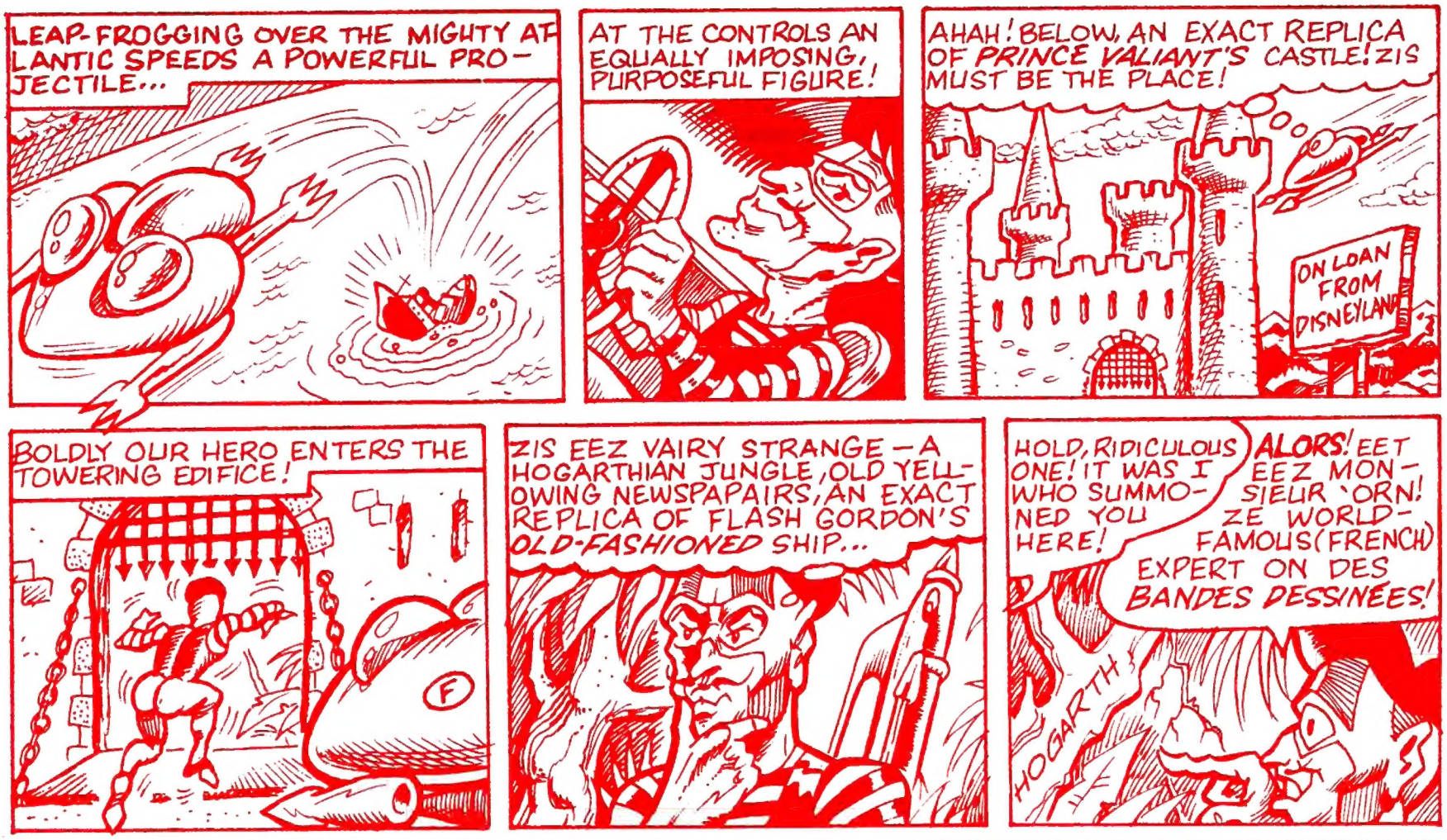
Future issues of BRAVE & BOLD bring back Mr Miracle, Hawkman, and the Demon.

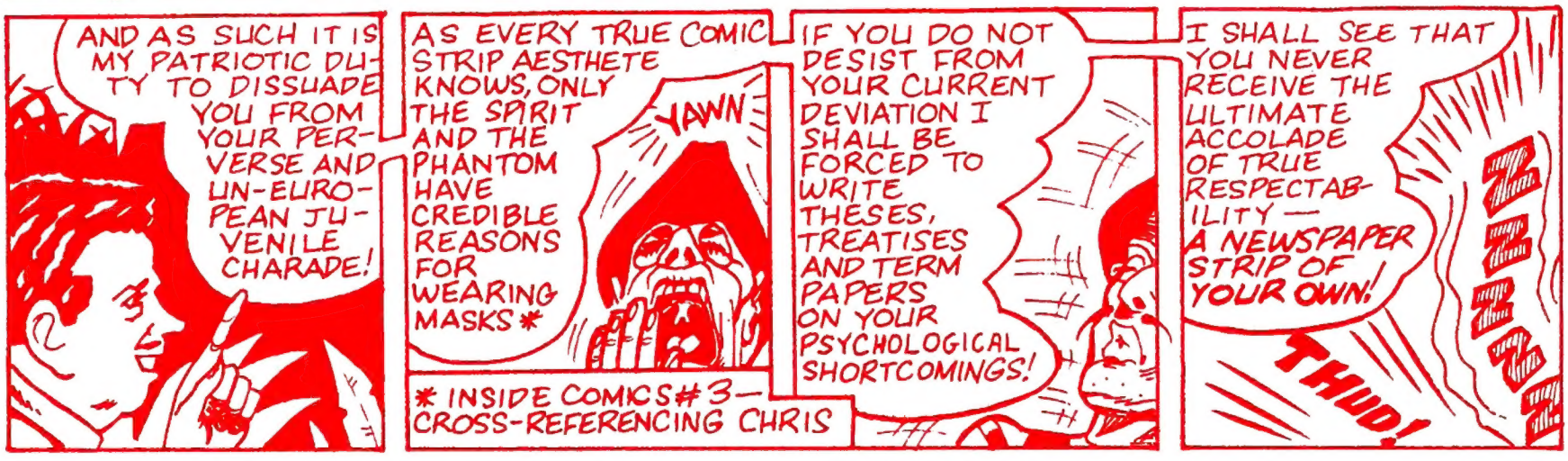
The illo to the left is the wrap-around new cover by Berni Wrightson for the 60c ORIGINAL SWAMP THING SAGA, which reprints Swampy's first two issues with no ads.

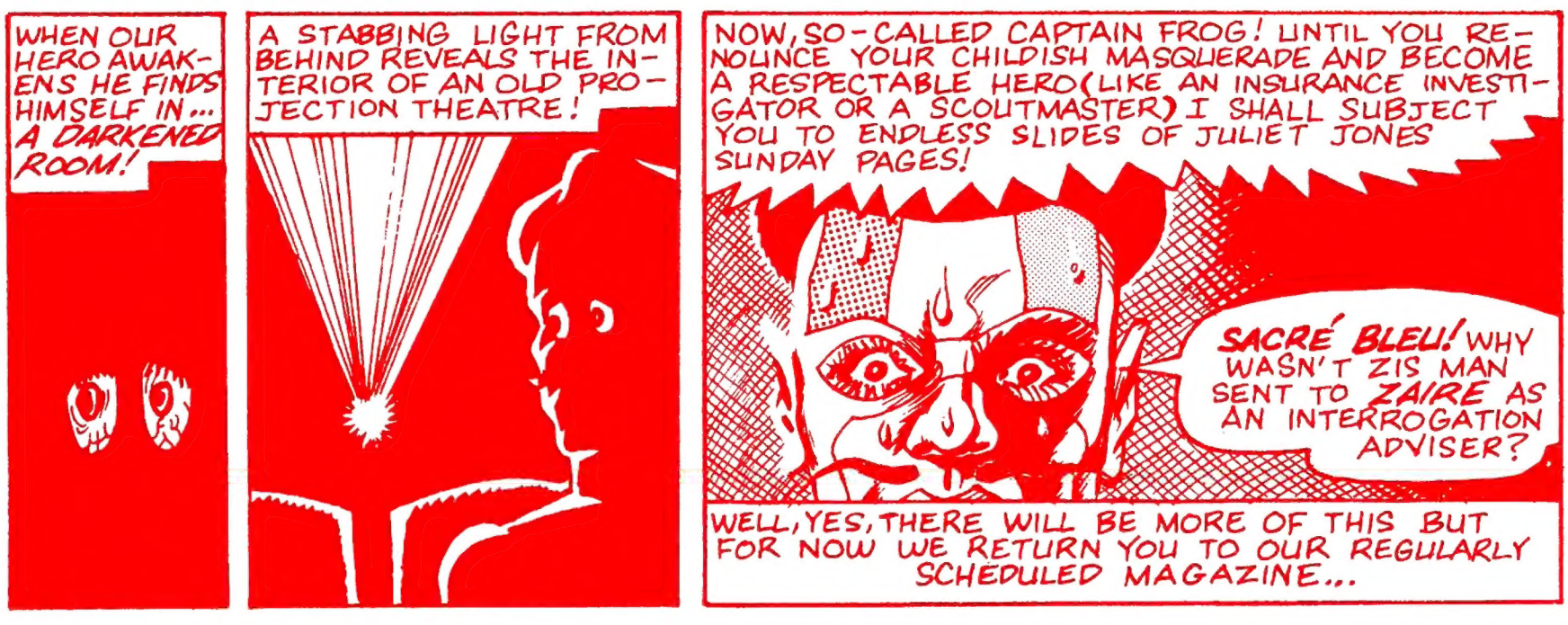
CHARLTON are back -- revived titles include BILLY THE KID, GHOSTLY HAUNTS, GHOSTLY TALES, GHOST MANOR, HAUNTED, THE MANY GHOSTS OF DR GRAVES, MONSTER HUNTERS, SCARY TALES, and SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN, along with FIGHTIN' ARMY & ditto MARINES. Look out for BIONIC WOMAN ≠1 as well, though the TV show's move from ABC to NBC may delay ≠2. Mainly old inventory material will be used to start with.

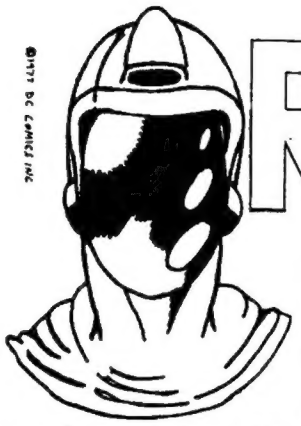
Ralph Reese, Russ Heath and Rudy Nebres have done work for Warren; CREEPY ≠91 is a reprint issue, including Adams & Wood.

Chris Ash PRESENTS: CAPTAIN FROG RO


LEAP-FROGGING OVER THE MIGHTY ATLANTIC SPEEDS A POWERFUL PROJECTILE...
AT THE CONTROLS AN EQUALLY IMPOSING, PURPOSEFUL FIGURE!
AHAH! BELOW, AN EXACT REPLICA OF PRINCE VALIANT'S CASTLE! ZIS MUST BE THE PLACE!
ON LOAN FROM DISNEYLAND
BOLDLY OUR HERO ENTERS THE TOWERING EDIFICE!
ZIS EEZ VAIRY STRANGE — A HOGARTHIAN JUNGLE, OLD YELLOWING NEWSPAPAIRS, AN EXACT REPLICA OF FLASH GORDON'S OLD-FASHIONED SHIP...
HOLD, RIDICULOUS ONE! IT WAS I WHO SUMMONED YOU HERE!
ALORS! EET EEZ MONSIEUR 'ORN! ZE WORLD-FAMOUS (FRENCH) EXPERT ON DES BANDES DESSINÉES!
HOGARTH


AND AS SUCH IT IS MY PATRIOTIC DUTY TO DISSUADE YOU FROM YOUR PERVERSE AND UN-EUROPEAN JUVENILE CHARADE!
AS EVERY TRUE COMIC STRIP AESTHETE KNOWS, ONLY THE SPIRIT AND THE PHANTOM HAVE CREDIBLE REASONS FOR WEARING MASKS *
YAWN
* INSIDE COMICS #3 — CROSS-REFERENCING CHRIS
IF YOU DO NOT DESIST FROM YOUR CURRENT DEVIATION I SHALL BE FORCED TO WRITE THESES, TREATISES AND TERM PAPERS ON YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL SHORTCOMINGS!
I SHALL SEE THAT YOU NEVER RECEIVE THE ULTIMATE ACCOLADE OF TRUE RESPECTABILITY — A NEWSPAPER STRIP OF YOUR OWN!
THUD!


WHEN OUR HERO AWAKENS HE FINDS HIMSELF IN... A DARKENED ROOM!
A STABBING LIGHT FROM BEHIND REVEALS THE INTERIOR OF AN OLD PROJECTION THEATRE!
NOW, SO-CALLED CAPTAIN FROG! UNTIL YOU RENOUNCE YOUR CHILDISH MASQUERADE AND BECOME A RESPECTABLE HERO (LIKE AN INSURANCE INVESTIGATOR OR A SCOUTMASTER) I SHALL SUBJECT YOU TO ENDLESS SLIDES OF JULIET JONES SUNDAY PAGES!
SACRÉ BLEU! WHY WASN'T ZIS MAN SENT TO ZAIRE AS AN INTERROGATION ADVISER?
WELL, YES, THERE WILL BE MORE OF THIS BUT FOR NOW WE RETURN YOU TO OUR REGULARLY SCHEDULED MAGAZINE...



REG USPATOFF

A writer I know, in a letter following my last column in this magazine, took issue with my assertion that adding 3 pages of story to a comic would cost less than a cent; well, let's look at the figures. The current amount that Marvel or DC pays for a page of art is in the region of $50, while the script would add on, say, $15 on average--those extra three pages would therefore cost around $200 per title. That may seem like a fairly large sum, but if you spread it over a total sale of 160,000 copies of that particular title that month, it works out at an eighth of a cent per copy! When the companies are putting the cover price up by forty times that much in one fell swoop, would that be too great a burden?

I'm not going to talk about the great debate over format changes this time; at least, not to any great extent. It looks as if it is coming, since DC's reports on both 60 cent books and Dollar Comics are very encouraging--but in the meantime, an extra two or three pages of art, and less tedious, boringly presented house ads, would make a lot of people happy. Trying to put a month's worth of characterisation and plot advancement into 17 pages can be difficult--while there's always room for a fight or two, sub-plots and the other sophistications are often in danger of being squeezed out entirely. The younger readers probably won't mind, or even take much notice -- it's the older reader that the comics companies are in danger of losing. I'm not necessarily talking of the fan, or even the collector--comics are read more by housewives, students at college or high school, and all the bathroom regulars. They have got the money to pick up a couple of comics at the stand, or in the supermarket, once or twice a week, every week -- and each time one of them is turned off by the simpler, shorter stories, or all-action episodes of interminable serials, then the comics circulations feel the pinch. "The comics sure ain't as good as they used to be", the cry goes up--and another customer is lost. The only way that circulations can stabilise, or even improve, is for comics to hang on to the older readers longer. Not many non-readers are going to pick up a "Wonder Woman" comic out of curiosity, and get hooked; any increase inspired by the TV version will still be mainly from people who do have a place for comics in their lives.

But I've been straying from the point. A longer story gives more space to please the reader in, to entertain him, make him chuckle or shudder--to HOOK him, to make sure he comes back next month. That $200 that Stan and Jenette are "saving" by only giving 17, or 34, or 64 pages of story would be put to much better use if it was invested in a better comic. At the moment, it's a vicious circle--a smaller sale means a smaller comic, and a smaller comic means a still smaller sale.

It hasn't taken NATIONAL LAMPOON long to become an institution, with its truly awesome bad taste and jolly cameraderie, mixed with comics and satire. Despite the occasional Frazetta cover, or Neal Adams interiors, I've never been exactly fond of it -- but now it's had its first spin-off magazine, and, wonder of wonders, it is a heavy, slick, expensive, colourful comic book, of all things.

So, how long is it going to last? No, that's a defeatist attitude. The magazine is called HEAVY METAL, and it's mainly a reprint of a French zine which rejoices in the name of METAL HURLANT. For $1.50 you get a hundred pages, a fifth of them in colour, with art by French artists like Moebius, Druillet, & Mezieres, along with "Den" by Rich Corben and "Sunpot" by Vaughn Bodé, and even a NatLamp artist or two. It calls itself "The Adult Illustrated Fantasy Magazine", in letters a good deal smaller than "From the people who bring you the National Lampoon".

A new type of comic-book then, for the American market -- featuring fables and fantasy, distinctly different from just about anything previously offered to the Great Reading Public by Marvel, Warren, DC, or anyone else this side of the undergrounds. Now, this is great, especially if top-quality underground material is to be given a wider showcase; but what sort of sales do they need to keep going?

So, how long is it going to last? The word is, seven issues...

Let's talk about that nasty subject, failure. to be exact, the rate of failure of new titles at both Marvel and DC. Omega, Inhumans, Ragman, Guardians of the Galaxy, Phantom Stranger, Iron Fist, Kobra, Super-Villain Team-Up, Hercules Unbound, Lois Lane, Kung Fu Fighter, The Cat, Claw -- get the idea? Sometimes, one gets the idea that a new title has been put on the schedules not out of the hope that it will make money, but merely to humour its creator. Sure-fire best-sellers like NOVA are few and far between; even Stan Lee followed up the great FANTASTIC FOUR with a book which bombed out after six issues (starring the Hulk). But does Ms Kahn really expect SHADE THE CHANGING MAN to be the superhero sensation of the seventies? Out goes PLASTIC MAN with #20 after a run of ten issues in his latest incarnation, and out goes STARFIRE with #8. Even a book with a TV tie-in, ISIS, ends with #8; if you doubt the very high mortality rate of new projects at DC, have a look at their schedules. There are the books which have been going for decades, a few hanging in at around fifty to eighty issues, a few in single figures--and, in the testing period between #10 and #40, very few indeed.

Plastic Man, of course, isn't the only hero to have failed once, only to be put back on the stands a few years later. At the moment METAL MEN, TEEN TITANS, MISTER MIRACLE, ALL STAR, AQUAMAN, CHALLENGERS, GREEN LANTERN, SUPERBOY, ENEMY ACE, and DOOM PATROL are all having a new chance at stardom -- if they're worth publishing now, why were they ever scrapped in the first place? A lot of DC employees were comics fans in the sixties, when most of these features were in their heyday--it's natural for them to want to revive them now that they've got the chance, and channel their creative energies into these second-hand projects. But none of them are very likely to set the comics biz on fire this time around, and as soon as the current expansionist mood passes, most of them are going to vanish once more.

It's the new ideas that will provide a new SPIDER-MAN, FLASH, or WONDER WOMAN; to find them requires skill, judgement, a lot of luck, and a mean streak a yard wide, to tell the latest would-be Gardner Fox that his latest project would quiver and die on the stands within hours. Will FREEDOM FIGHTERS get to double figures? How about STAR HUNTERS, or Marvel's new GODZILLA and HUMAN FLY?

For every failure, the companies start a new project, which in turn fails, nine times out of ten. If Marvel have an edge on DC at the moment, it's because their failure rate is slightly lower, with THE INVADERS, NOVA, and HOWARD joining the ranks of solid sellers. Will we see BLACK LIGHTNING and WARLORD up there with WEIRD WAR and ACTION?

Here's to a few more successes, both for DC and Marvel; boy, do we all need them.

-REG USPATOFF

THE HIGHGATE SIX RETURN

It was over a year ago that the group known as "The Highgate Six" first met; and now, five of them have come together once more. As before, Ruan Lanihorne is acting as host, with Ed "Fan-Things" Sallis, Jonn Hay, Diana Richmond, and Martin Lock also on hand; since Henry Sandwich wasn't able to come, a stock of Colt 45 has been laid in, and Bem's awesome assistant editor, Nige Edwards, is just arriving, as the tape begins.

NE Don't bother to get up, fans!

JH -- Not <u>that</u> Nigel Edwards, Ruey? I'd been thinking you meant the chap who draws the cartoons in Fiesta. Oh well, good night, all!

RL All right, settle down, Haybag. If I know Martin he will print everything you say, so how about some couth, eh?

JH Well, us geniuses are temperamental--

NE You're half the way there then -- you're just plain mental!

ES Isn't it nice when people hit it off together so well?

RL Okay, quiet at the back. On the phone the other night, Martin and I made up a list of possible topics.

JH Pricing? Fan apathy? Dez Skinn?

RL A list of possible topics, which were --Diana, you've got the paper.

DR Fanzines, public attitudes, the state of comics in general, conventions. That is all I've got, but knowing this lot, we could fill a whole issue of Martin's zine with any two of those.

NE How about the public attitude to comics readers over the age of eight, anyway? It takes courage to get out a copy of Spider-Man on the bus...

ML ...When everyone else is reading the Sun, or gazing out of the window, yes. I must admit I tend to read books, or fanzines, on the train, and comics at home--it's a habit I've got into.

DR And it's a cowardly habit, Mr Emlock. You look reasonably intelligent and grown-up, if people saw you sitting there reading the latest Unexpected--

JH --And counting the panels?

DR Want to start counting your teeth, Mr Hay? What I was saying is that if we all read comics openly, that would help to make people think more highly of comics.

NE But what if Martin's lips moved?

ML I don't have to come <u>here</u> to be insulted, Nige -- I can go almost anywhere!

ES I see what Diana's getting at. Too many of the older fans have got the idea that comics reading isn't respectable, and if, because of this, they don't read 'em in public, people will continue to link comics reading with weird-looking, long-haired teeny-boppers.

NE You leave Jonn Hay out of this, Ed!

ML I think we're simplifying things too much -- and enough comics for the coach journey from Worcester to London would weigh too much to carry around, anyway -- the latest "Weird Heroes" paperback is much more convenient.

RL Well, comics are never going to be <u>too</u> respectable, anyway, since almost all their readers are around the age of twelve, reading Marvel along with this week's Bullet and Action.

DR But surely it's more morally uplifting to read Howard, or Superman, than about kill-crazy sharks and dinosaurs.

JH Some of my best friends are kill-crazy dinosaurs, I'll have you know!

NE Yes, I've met Rich Burton, Dez Skinn, Nick Landau, K. Swilliams...

JH Who's working you, Edwoods?

ES It seems to me that the British comics are just plain action, or football, for action's sake, without any progress or moral, while most American comics do give older readers a bit more.

RL And who wants to identify with a young character who gets sent to bed by his parents without any supper most weeks?

DR Americans are louder, less inhibited, and the kids get their own way more--

ML Yes; can you imagine Nova being sent to the headmaster for six of the best?

NE Talking about Nova, Martin, you always seem to give it a favourable review in "Tale-Enders"--don't you think that to deliberately look back at the early Stan Lee sixties, as Marv is doing, is a... well, a backward step?

JH What, are you still awake?

NE I was just resting my eyes. Martin?

ML Well, re-discovering the simpler, less cluttered approach to super-heroics is a refreshing change--few new directions are <u>really</u> new, after all.

RL It certainly makes a change to have a nerd as the hero.

JH What, has Nige got his own strip now?

NE Aren't they missing you at the monkey house yet, Jonn old friend?

ML Richard Ryder isn't really a "nerd"--he's learning all the time. After all, Peter Parker used to be a klutz...

ES And it seems to me he still is. I must say that I don't read all that many new comics these days, but I do collect Nova --and of course Marv Wolfman's Tomb of Dracula too.

RL It's a shame Tomb of Drac seems to be going bi-monthly.

NE Well, the same old team six times a year is better than Jack Kirby twelve, or two hundred, times a year -- and if Gene Colan has to do the daily Howard the Duck strip, he had to cut down on his work-load somewhere else.

DR I wonder what Kirby <u>will</u> do next, now that he's been taken off Cap America?

RL Thank goodness!

NE Well, there are a few film adaptations Marvel are supposed to be doing, like "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Jabberwocky".

JH I can see it now, a new British film called "Carry On Kirby", with Big Barda played by Barbara Windsor, and Charles Hawtrey as Mr Miracle, Kenneth Connor as Funky Flashman...

NE And you can play the Great Tode, from the Deviants, okay?

JH Aw, your uncle wears army drawers!

RL All subtle stuff -- but don't break my furniture you two, it's not paid for.

ML Yes, quieten down. Before we run out of tape, let's talk a little about the state of comics in general. Ed?

ES Well, they're a bit short, aren't they?

NE And a bit pricey, now that they're going up to 35 cents.

DR Maybe those book-and-record sets will become regular items in the future, for people who don't want to read at all...

JH No more panel-counting for you, Emlock! You'll have to count the grooves instead!

NE Maybe professional, commercially viable comics are going to vanish completely, like the pulps before them--we'll only have fan publications left.

ES I wonder which pro artists would do work for the love of it for such zines, if there wasn't any money to be had...

JH Yes, Jack Kirby would have to go out and get a proper job.

NE Polishing the Stan Lee typewriter, maybe, or apologising to McGregor.

ML But, to be serious, I do hope that we see the fifty, or sixty, cent format replace the 17-pagers. Better value, and, with more space, better stories.

RL Yes, same here--though it would be nice to see Marvel 80-pagers too.

NE How long before they start to drop the page-count, or increase the prices?

JH You're a misery-guts, Edwoods, and, what's worse, you're probably right.

RL Well, it had to happen some time...

NE Look, I'll have you know I'm a genius of the first magnitude -- there aren't many people this brilliant allowed out, you know!

DR Yes, quite, Nige. Hey, Ruan, can't we adopt him as a mascot, or something?

JH He could pose on the bonnet of your Rolls-Royce when you go out driving..?

ES But where would fandom be without him?

JH I don't know, but I'm willing to--

RL If a bomb went off in this room now, fandom would never be the same.

NE Mike Cruden doesn't know where you live, does he, Ruan?

RL Oh well, on that poignant point, we'd better draw rapidly to a close...

JH Now that's the first sensible thing I have heard tonight--does it mean we can open the beer now?

NE Jonn, for once I agree with you!

REACTION

Dear Martin,

I'm going through one of my "hate comics" phases at the moment. Well, not really, but I've stopped buying for a while. To be honest, I'm getting a greater kick out of being part of fandom than I am reading most of the junk being produced. It's only temporary, of course; it has happened to me before, so there's no danger of me wildly selling off my collection. I'm reading a lot of Harlan Ellison SF at the moment, so that's keeping me off the streets, anyway.

At the moment the only comics I've any real interest in are the Warrens and the undergrounds -- at least there's a chance of surprises there. As for Marvel and DC, there's so much product that I'm quite lost. Has anyone ever tried to figure out how much it would cost annually to keep up with all the comics, including imports?

Every time I get interested in a book, something goes completely wrong--the book is scrapped, or, worse still, altered out of all recognition. It happened with Green Lantern, which returned as a bloody space opera. It's still Denny O'Neil scripting, but now we find that "Relevance is out of date" -- shiiit! As for Mike Grell's art, he's a good technician, a professional, but his art hasn't got the fire and the bite that Adams is capable of. Dr Strange was at its peak of writing when it was announced that they wanted to turn him into a superhero; something similar was creeping into Swamp Thing at DC just two issues before it got the chop. E-Man has gone, and Warlock, while Eisner's well of Spirit stories is almost dry.

How long will Howard the Duck continue before they stick a lousy artist onto him and gloss him up? they did it with Spider-Man a long, long time ago and I've never enjoyed the comic since.

So really it's as Al Matheson mentioned in Reaction, a glance at the undergrounds is worthwhile, if only to put the Marvel and DC comics into perspective. In fact, those who haven't discovered them before have a lot of catching up to do, and a lot of really fine magic to unravel, so get to it.

-Harry McAvinchey.

Dear Martin,

Thanx for Bemusing -- rather pleased at the move up in size--can only be for the good. The issue appealed to me more than the last ones, I enjoyed the article on Deathlok, which made some intelligent points about the cinematic effects and the computer's voice-overs.

As you know, I don't really rate US comics at all now, and so I am trying to force you (selfishly I know) into producing a mag that will be more analytical in its approach. I'm pleased to see that the first signs of this happening were evident in Bem 13.

-Al Matheson.

Dear Martin,

Loved Bem's new size, but please will you put "Do Not Bend" on the envelope next time, as some dim-witted postman, rather than slip it under the front door, managed to stuff it through the letter box; I apologise to any postmen reading this.

In reply to Don MacLeod's letter last ish, thanks for your comments on my art, and yes this is my real name.

-Nick Neocleous.

Don't worry, Nick--Superswipe used to have exactly the same problem...

Dear Martin,

Harry McAvinchey doesn't know what I look like. Heh heh heh! None of them know what I look like. Now if I can just keep it that way--

-Kathleen Glancy.

Dear Martin,

The new size is a little confusing (in fact, ALL British sizes are a little confusing--what happened to the 8½" x 11" and multiples and factors thereof that are customary in this country?) and the 3- and 4-column pages are getting hard to read; BATMANIA, even with its larger pages, has only 2--perhaps that might be better.

I agree with Reg Uspatoff that house ads have become just a little too abundant of late -- but what they do is to fill pages without ads that they can't afford to fill with art! After all, an original art page costs about £50 (plus the cost of the script), and a house ad not only costs a lot less, being made from existing stills by junior staffers, but can be used over and over; DC has been carrying this to terribly shoddy heights, even running an ad for a comic, like Shade #1, in the comic itself! DC will be adding a page to the 48-pagers, which will now contain 34, instead of 33, pages of story, but you just can't fight inflation.

Interesting Glancy column, once again--though she isn't quite consistent; she certainly did believe "that unlikely 'clay statue' story" a few months ago, when she speculated in another zine on just how much Hippolyte knew about anatomy. A good essay on mythology in comics, though -- I wonder how she reacted to the Egyptian lore of Dr Fate?

-Rich Morrissey.

The mind boggles, Rich--but fancy accusing a lady of being inconsistent! People have been felled by a well-aimed low-flying caber for less!

Dear Martin,

What an ish! This is certainly a 100% improvement. The new format is brilliant, allowing much more room for Rich Morrissey (where was he this ish?), Reg Us Pat Off, Reaction, reviews et al.

Captain Frog was pretty amusing, but could have been smaller. That way, you could have put more into the strip without wasting pages. Reg Uspatoff was as usual interesting; Kathleen Glancy? Pretty good, I thought -- quite witty, but I hope she doesn't always pursue the sex in comics angle, because this could become tedious.

Reaction got to me. I don't like the idea of young Marvel-only comix fans being knocked within the walls of organised fandom, particularly because it's not so long since I was one myself. It is perhaps stupid to ignore DC completely, and hiss when they're mentioned (as I gather the Marvelites did at the Stan Lee Roundhouse affair), but then, it is really the fault of DC themselves; their "distribution" is really a joke in bad taste. I've searched far and wide, and cannot find one shop that has DCs on a regular basis. As for Jim Warren, his UK distribution is totally nonexistent. This is a pity; Warren, being probably (a conclusion I have reached from reading fanzines for 3 years) the best in the business, if not the most profitable, it's pretty annoying to have to pay import prices. Marvel are the only comics company in Britain at the moment with any sort of organisation. Everybody was a Marvel-only reader once...one then gets into fandom, whether through an ad in a British Weekly or picking up a 'zine at a comics shop. You then discover the world of the Adams Batman, Starlin's Warlock, and Steranko's Chandler (a truly brilliant concept in comix); and so, perhaps, to the Undergrounds. Let us call the Marvel-only stage the embryo of the true comic collector.

Fan-Things: I really don't think that everybody should knock George Barnett as if he was another Gerry Conway; he does produce one of the best 'zines out today, and has lowered the average price of comics in Britain (like selling SILVER SURFER 1 for £1.40 when most were selling it for £2.50 -- I don't need to go on, do I?). He may have cannibalised WEIRD TRASH 4, but he did apologise in Reaction, only to receive a rather curt reply in Fan-Things ("Jaws"???). Still...

-Matthew Vaughan.

We love Jaws, honest! It was only lack of space that made our reply seem "curt". No fan should be a one-company collector, as all have something good to offer -- just some have more than others. -Nige

Dear Martin,

I wish everybody would leave the DC vs Marvel subject alone. I'm a dedicated Marvelite, but I don't want to stay that way. What's stopping me? One simple reason --CASH. At the age of 13 (nearly 14), my weekly income is nothing to brag about. I do my best to keep away from DCs, as I can't afford to buy more comics, but the way things are going I'll end up buying them, and if I'm hooked, I'm hooked for good.

At the moment Marvel satisfy my needs for a good comic book -- I will probably start buying DCs in a few years time, but until then, "Make Mine Marvel".

-Roger McBroom.

Dear Martin,

Pete April must be hungry if he wants to sink his teeth into 50c and $1 books! I can't agree with what he said about the Champions, and even Ms Marvel has improved since Chris Claremont started writing it.

Speaking generally about Reaction, I'd like to see more criticism of DC, as in my opinion Marvel have been criticised a bit much lately. DC have more of the most talented people now, but Marvel have a greater number of people with reasonable talent; DC may have Staton, Simonson and Englehart, but most of their other writers and artists aren't very good. Mike Grell, for instance, has decayed a lot since his first work for DC. Walt Simonson's work in Savage Sword isn't up to much, I think -- what are the opinions of Bemusingdom Assembled?

Before I close, I must mention that, despite what you may have heard, DC are not trying to obtain copyright on Howard Stangroom, so WOODPECKER FAMILY may not appear, at least for a while.

-Ken Moore.

"Bemusingdom Assembled", is it now, Ken? It would be quite a large mob these days if we all did congregate somewhere! Don't let Chris Ash hear about this "Woodpecker Family" comic, it'll give him ideas....

Dear Martin,

I see poor old Jack Kirby's still taking a knocking from almost everyone, a shame really because Jack is second to none in making comics history. I still think he's a great talent, but a lot of the criticism is justified; Jack is his own worst enemy, and needs harnessing. I still think his finest work was done when he was teamed up with Joe Simon -- even people who have seen their stuff reprinted can't really experience the magic of the originals.

Concerning the discussion about the so-called Golden Age of comics -- well, it's not just so-called, it really was the Golden Age of comics. While there probably are more good artists in comics today, where are the people who can compare with Crandall, Cole, Eisner, Foster, Hogarth, Fine, and a few who are still pushing a pencil today, thankfully, like Severin, Kubert, Tuska and Kirby--those are just a few names that spring to mind. Also, the comics were twice as thick, and while the stories were simple, they were enjoyable, and the superheroes didn't have hang-ups about environmental conditions and such; they knew they belonged to the world of fantasy, and were better for it.

-Ray Hopkins.

Dear Martin,

I've never written a letter of comment to Bem (Joe is very "attached" to every new issue, so I only just manage to read them) but I felt I had to write, because the change of size has made a helluva lot of difference; now you can fit lots and lots of news, articles, art, etc into only (only?) 16 pages--Panelologist watch out!

Personally, my favourite parts were Captain Frog, Katholicity, Reaction and, my favourite, Fan-Things. Some of the art was very good -- you have a very talented team working for you.

Remember, readers--having Nige Edwards replying to your letters is not the end of the world...not quite, anyway...

-John Matthews.

Guess who's replying to your letter, sheep features? And, take it from me that for you it is the end of the world!

Dear Martin,

I love the A4 format, it makes a nice change from the A5. Captain Frog was OK, but I don't really think it was worth a full page; now Stangroom the Woodpecker was worth TWO pages--keep it! Thundermole raised a giggle, keep this as well.

Katholicity was quite sniggerable, and I hope it continues, but do change the name, Kath!

I hope someone with a lot of money (Paul Burton?) supports Barry K. Winetrobe's idea. SF and Fantasy--and even Star Trek --have organised clubs, but comics don't seem to. I'd try and organise one myself --maybe I will one day, but that'll have to wait until I establish GALAXY-Z, and, most importantly, get rich.

-Phil Hartley.

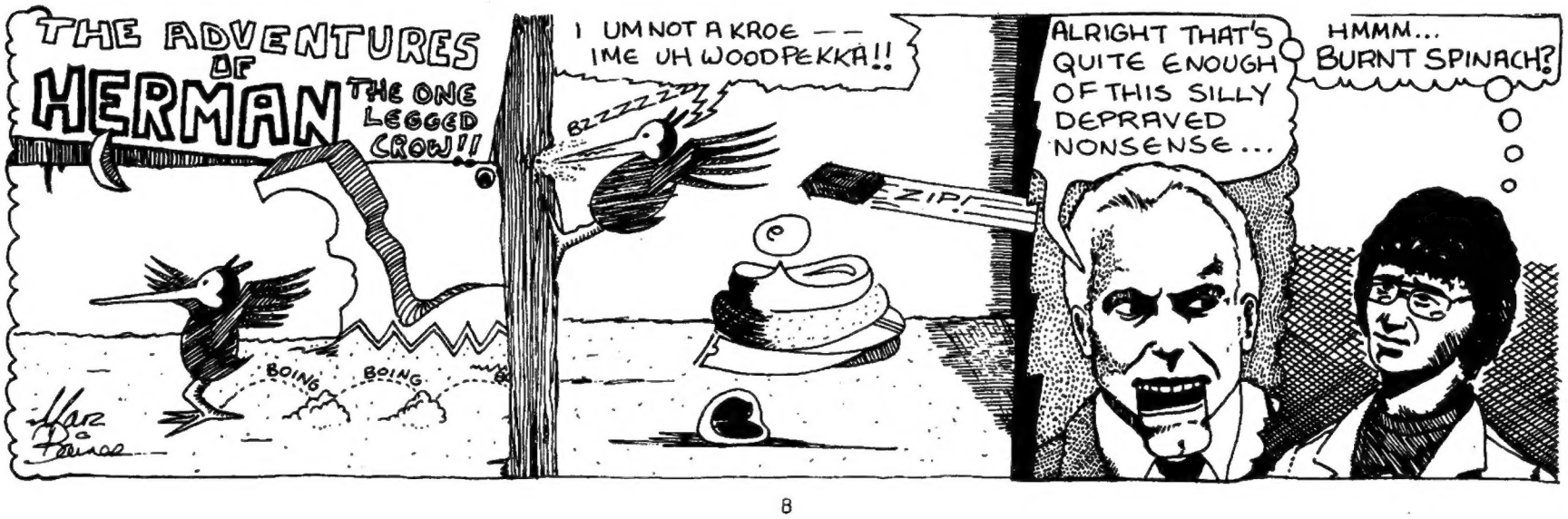
Dear Martin,

Thanks for the Bem 13, the ad brought in quite a few orders for Comixine, and meant that I'd sold out in only nine days from getting the magazine back from the printers!

There are a few points in the letter from Mark Bilsborough that I don't agree with. He mentions Marvel's ultra-commercialism as being "short sighted", well it's about the only thing they can do to push up sales, what the hell do you think commercialism is? The "reduction in staff, a whittling away of the less popular" would mean getting rid of the innovative artists whose work is too experimental, intelligent and sophisticated for this kid's medium -- why do you think 'Amazing Adventures featuring Killraven' gets cancelled and Spider-Man hangs on in there (True Believer)? I see no phoenix rising from the ashes of Marvel; maybe they'll produce a few good intelligent comics in the next few years, but if they don't coat the product with commerciality (as with HTD) then they'll soon fade in the night, gone but not forgotten by the fans who'll still be able to look back on them. It's unfortunate that, as far as Marvel are concerned, we can only look back on some of the good comics that there have been. Howard the Duck is still of a fairly high standard, the 'Almuric' adaptation sounds promising, the X-Men (incorporating Star Trek, it seems!) is doing all right, and Dracula is still of a high quality (but for how long), but after that there's nothing, most of the mags seem to be full of repeats of old plots.

Over at DC, Janette Kahn seems to have some good ideas; I hope the Dollar Comics do get off the ground, this will give space for experimental strips as back-ups. Speaking of back-up strips, Mike Nasser seems to be doing a very good Neal Adams, much better than Mike Grell who has, like John & Sal Buscema, Jack Kirby, Carmine Infantino, Herb Trimpe & many many others before him, fallen into the production line rut--let's hope Nasser proves himself a worthy replacement for Adams. Englehart should do some good stuff for DC before he quits the business (boo hoo, boo hoo!), and there are quite a few other talents available, if only they'd be put to their best use. Maybe the ground-level comics are one area we should look to for better comix; fanzines too have great potential for entertainment, in fact in some cases I'd rather read an amateur magazine than a professional comic.

-Marc Baines.


THE ADVENTURES OF HERMAN THE ONE LEGGED CROW!!
BOING BOING
I UM NOT A KROE -- IME UH WOODPEKKA!!
BZZZZZZ
ZIP!
ALRIGHT THAT'S QUITE ENOUGH OF THIS SILLY DEPRAVED NONSENSE...
HMMM... BURNT SPINACH?

Dear Martin,

If these were the staunchly swinging sixties, and I was Julius Schwartz, I'd award original art (not mine, of course) to Don MacLeod, Suhail Akhtar, Jerry Rees, Mark Bilsborough, Stephen Billing and Matthew Moorcroft, a life-subscription to the Beano for Nigel Squires, and I will reserve comment on Pete April. Actually, I didn't think the premiere episode of Captain Frog looked too hot, but then it was prepared for the previous page size.

I've often wondered... does Kathleen Glancy spend as much time indulging in sex as she spends writing about it? If so, I must work her into a future Stangroom episode, if she'll send me a pictorial reference (subtle, huh?).

Readers of the Listener (and I know that includes nobody) may have chanced upon a recent article by Paul Gambaccini, in which he mentions a thesis he had written on ECs etc. He was speculating (accurately as it turned out) on the now-current cut-down on televisual violence, and drawing a parallel between contemporary TV and the pressures which led to the establishment of the comics code. I wrote to Paul asking if he still had a copy of said thesis for possible publication in a British fanzine. Apparently Roy Thomas has scheduled it for the now-famous next issue of Alter Ego, so maybe our grand-children have got something to look forward to after all.

-Chris Ash.

Dear Martin,

To escape from the nasty but necessary reality of A level revision, I cloistered myself in my bedroom with a few beers, Black Sabbath on the stereo (at maximum volume, natch) and Bem 13.

Being half French, I absolutely loved Captain Frog; if there is a fancy dress parade at Marvelcon 77, I might just pluck up enough courage to make a total ass of myself and go as Le Capitaine, but no promises! The Deathlok blurb was mainly nostalgia provoking, and made me read Astonishing Tales 25 to 36 again. It is unfortunate that our homicidal cyborg is now in 1977 since as a supporting guest he will not be handled in the same way. If anybody wants to see a similar type of character, then 2000 A.D. has Mach-1. I know it's a poor substitute, but preferable to NO Deathlok.

And, speaking of 2000 A.D. who the hell is the artist who did Judge Dredd in issues 9 and 11? All I remember is that he did some Dalek stories for TV 21, many moons ago, plus a Thunderbirds story in black & white for a summer special. Does anybody know his name, and any other work he might have done? I think he's really ace!

Marvel was, in 1975-76, going through a somewhat bad patch with DC biting hard on their heels; their main trouble now is the covers. Although a few good ones have seeped through, most of the rest have been diabolical -- the Jack Kirby ones especially! The inside art has improved, though, tremendously -- especially with Gil Kane's return to interior artwork.

-Laurent Wright.

Dear Martin,

Arrg! Kathleen Glancy's been given her own column! Damn! Blast etc...Just when I was all set to offer her a 7-year contract, with options--this means war, Emlock! The column itself was delightful; I hate her for being so much better a writer than what I am...

As for that strip at the bottom of Kath's page, I don't believe I'll deign to comment ...except to speculate idly as to Mr Ash's eventual appearance once his face has been torn off in half-inch strips...

Aside to Trevor Phoenix; the reason everybody's slagging Gerry Conway is that, while no-one's attempting to dispute his ability as a writer, as a human being he seems to have as much sensitivity as your average heap of parrot-droppings (oh, ghod; nostalgia-time for old Monty Python fans) and all the emotional maturity of a three-year old. In fact, considering his behind-the-scenes power plays, it's been a constant source of amazement to me that his writings display as much insight as they do. If I were Jenette Kahn (pause, while readers think up suitable images) or, for that matter, Stan Lee, I would refuse to have Conway, simply on the grounds that his undoubted talents would not make up for the disruption he'd cause. (--and yes, you can contribute to YSJ; the only criterion is that you send something in that's better than the work already being published...)

-Howard Stangroom.

Dear Martin,

I thought the "Made In Britain" column a very good idea--it's surprising how many comic readers totally ignore everything except Marvel and DC comics. Me, I read anything and everything--I even buy things like PLAYHOUR and BEANO occasionally if some drawings catch my eye. But, even though I like to think I've got a liberal attitude toward comics, I'm increasingly becoming fed up with American comics; and I know I'm not alone. In every fanzine's lettercol there are always people who are expressing disgust at the ever-falling standards of the two 'factories'. So what are those people doing about it?

I know it's been said a thousand times before, but there's only one place where a breakthrough can possibly take place--Underground comics. Most fans steer clear of them, either because they're not the sort of thing they'd like their parents to find under the bed, or because they imagine the stories will be above their heads -- this negative attitude could be combatted somewhat by the fanzines.

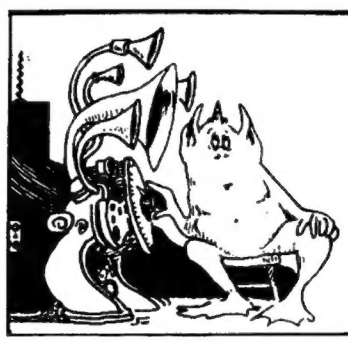
A reader simply cannot expect a working artist to be able to come up with new and exciting pieces of work all the time. The only way an artist is able to do this is either by remaining a part-time artist or periodically taking a rest from full-time comics, and doing something like painting or writing. Look at Rick Griffin--now his psychedelic days are firmly behind him (I hope...), he's doing a lot of painting and other things that will all influence his work. In Britain, there are many new and interesting artists around; all of them have different ideas about comics, and all are worth hunting out. Hunt Emerson is the best known of the undergrounders, but what about people like George Szostek, Martin Dutton (where are you?), Brodnax, and even myself. If they started drawing IRON MAN or KILLRAVEN, they'd instantly be acclaimed in this country as creative, innovative "true artists"--but while they continue to work in a hassle-free environment, blissfully ignoring standards, traditions and all the other crap forced onto people, they're ignored.

Times change, so do comics. The fans will have to learn to change as well--if you don't bend with the wind, you'll break.

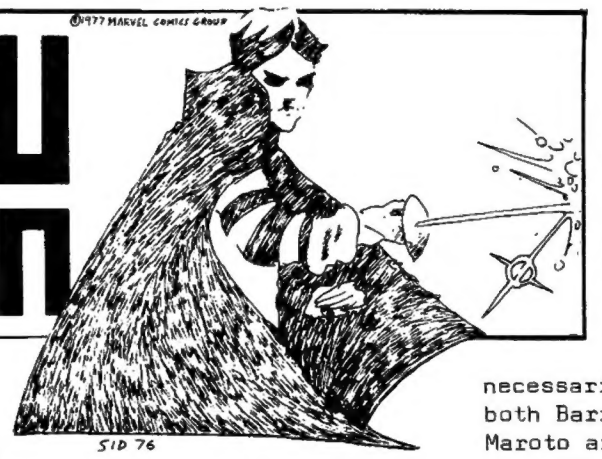
-Andrew Johnson.

And so ends what, after savage cutting all along the line, ends up as Bem's second longest lettercol yet. I've given priority to general topics of interest this time, but your views of Bem are still very much appreciated--but less likely to see print. But the main thing is -- write, right?

The Adventures of STANGROOM the WOODPECKER
IN A LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO GAIN COMIC BOOK IMMORTALITY STANGROOM HAS COMPROMISED HIS INTEGRITY AND... GONE UNDERGROUND!
MR SHAZEEPDOG SIR, IF YOU'RE A WIZARD, WHERE'S YOUR HAT?
DOES THAT ANSWER YOUR QUESTION?
SO YOU WANT TO AUDITION FOR A PART IN UNDERGROUNDS HUH?
IN THAT CASE THE FIRST THING WE SHALL NEED IS A FEMALE LEAD...
WA-HEY, HEY!
HOLD IT KID. ALLOW MY ASSISTANT TO BRING ON THE PROPS!
PROPS?
#4!
THAT'S RIGHT SONNY, BRING THE CRICKET BATS IN HERE
CRICKET BATS! OH BOY!
CENSORED
OKAY, MR SHAZEEPDOG, DO I GET TO DO HER NOW?
HUH? ARE YOU KIDDING? SHE'S FOR THE READERS. YOU'RE A WOODPECKER AREN'T YOU? SO PECK THESE BATS INTO BUSTS OF LINDA LOVELACE! THEY'LL LOVE IT IN SALFORD!
AND YOU CAN'T EVEN SEE THROUGH THE PANEL BORDERS AROUND HERE
ANYWAY, KNOWING THE DEPTH OF MS LOVELACE'S THROAT, AND THE SIZE OF HER BUSTS, STANGROOM SHOULD KEEP BUSY UNTIL NEXT ISH!



REVIEW SECTION



DAN DARE: PILOT OF THE FUTURE
by Frank Hampson & Angus P. Allan
New English Library, 128pp; 60p.
Paperback; London, May 1977

That almost triangular face with those strange arched eyebrows could only belong to one hero (no, not Namor, or Mr Spock) -- like the cover says, "Frank Hampson's great hero from the 'Eagle' is back!" Dan Dare, the best-known hero in post-war UK comics has burst upon the public again.

This book is a text adaptation of Frank Hampson's first story of Eagle's 'Pilot of the Future', illustrated with a selection of panels from those long-forgotten pages. Here once again the reader can relive the excitement of Dan's mission to Venus as he and his companions, including faithful Albert Fitzwilliam Digby of Wigan, Sir Hubert Guest, and Professor Jocelyn Peabody accomplish the first landing by the United World Government Space Fleet. And once on the surface of Venus, our intrepid heroes encounter the planet's two opposing races, the Treens and the Therons. The villain of the piece needs no introduction -- there can't be many fans of the Eagle who could have forgotten the Mekon.

I certainly experienced seven or eight truckloads of nostalgia reading this paperback. Surprisingly (?), the story isn't that dated, after 27 years! It is still a "rattling good yarn". Those who read Dan Dare when it first appeared in Eagle will enjoy this book as a link to those seemingly happier days of the 50s; those who were too young then will enjoy it now, and will find interesting comparisons with Dare's "successors" like Star Trek and Doctor Who... -Allan J. Palmer

TARZAN ≠2 (July)
"The Road to Opar" by Thomas & Buscema

I can see now that this book is going to be a smash hit (with me, at least). John Buscema's art is truly marvellous, and the story, as well as dealing with the origin of Tarzan and Jane, sets the scene for a really good-sounding next issue. A great ish all round; the only irritating thing is that it is most convenient that Tarzan speaks perfect English... -MDV

STAR WARS ≠1 (July)
by Roy Thomas & Howard Chaykin

Well, I don't know about you, but this title doesn't do a thing for me. Of course there are always problems in adapting a work to the comics medium, but what defeats me is why Marvel even want to <u>try</u>...with the muddy Chaykin artwork -- I wish he'd stop trying to be a cross between Alex Toth and Walt Simonson, and get back to being himself -- I can't see it lasting even as long as Logan's Run...

What's that? The story? Don't ask me to explain it to you; <u>I</u> can't understand it.
-Howard Stangroom

GODZILLA ≠1 (Aug)
"The Coming" by
Doug Moench, Herb
Trimpe & Jim Mooney

Well, this is the "coming"; perhaps the going will come soon. It seems that Marvel have entered the "disaster movie" field a little too late. Having read the first issue, all I said to myself was "where will it end?"

This issue gives us Godzilla's awakening (from an iceberg--yawn), and then, until the end, it's the usual page after page of tedious smash, smash, smash. Issue ≠2 will be the same. And ≠3. The art isn't too bad; the splash page is OK, but the rest of it? Just as clichéd as the script.

I forecast a dismal end for this book.
-Matthew D. Vaughan

DC SPECIAL ≠29 (September)
"The Untold Origin of the Justice
Society" by Levitz, Staton & Layton

And special for once it is. I have to review this book, it's both my duty and my intense desire--but how can mere words express the joy, the elation?

Written by Paul (Continuity King) Levitz with ART by Staton & Layton, this is the untold secret origin of the JSA--and it's the nearest thing to perfection I expect to see this year. Each of the characters is treated so well and so faithfully, both in the writing and the artwork, that it's hard to single out particular instances for special mention. But mention <u>must</u> be made of pages 29 & 30, showing -- but no, wait and see it for yourself. If you don't adore it you've got no soul, or else you are too young to appreciate where it's at.

I could go on to mention the twin splash pages at beginning and end; the portrayal of various supporting characters; the tie-in with Weird War ≠50--I could say so many things. But I'll just say: Buy it! If you don't, you'll be sorry... -K. Williams

JOHN CARTER ≠1 (June) & ≠2 (July)
by Marv Wolfman & Gil Kane. "The Air-
Pirates of Mars, Chapter I" inked by
Dave Cockrum; Chapter II, inked by Rudy
Nebres, "From the Shadows...Stara-Kan"

Superb! Despite being the junior ERBook, this title boasts the superior creative team, especially on the first issue. Gil has a field day with the battle scenes; Marv confirms his known awareness of the characters; and both inkers, with totally different styles, prove their competence. However, I'd rather the book was bimonthly as I've a horrible feeling that within 6 months or so Kane will leave, and the fill-in specialists such as Nebres, Mooney & DeZuniga will take over with formula art, and the book will slide down to an 'average' level. My! Things are really bad when I start worrying because a book is too good... -Barry K. Winetrobe

VAMPIRELLA ≠59
(April) - $1.25

Vampi's escapades do not, as a rule, impress me greatly. The covers are beautiful, and the lady herself lovely to look at, but José Gonzalez is, as an artist, a bad storyteller. This isn't necessarily a handicap, as both Barry Smith and Esteban Maroto are, or have been, the same, but Gonzalez lacks any distinctive style that might help overcome this fault. As to the scripts, the "formularization" is atrocious; Adam, Conrad Van Helsing, Pendragon and Vampirella conform so exactly to the age-old stereotypes of "handsome leading man", "embittered adventurer", "lovable old reprobate" & "beautiful heroine" that the stories are pretty painful to read. This issue's trite offering--something or other to do with a gay incubus -- is no exception.

No, I buy Vampi, perversely enough, for the back-up horror shorts, which for some reason are usually of better quality than those in the other Warrens, and am seldom disappointed; "Changes" by Roger McKenzie & Leo Duranona may be somewhat pretentious for my taste, and the McKenzie/José Ortiz "Funeral Day" may be a waste of space in my opinion, but that still leaves me with three gems to cackle over; "Force-Feed", by Cary Bates & Leopold Sanchez, is a delightfully ironic tale of a mass-murderer, who is also a vegetarian, becoming trapped in another creature's body...a body that is, to say the least, unsuited to him.

Rog McKenzie strikes again with "The Plot's the Thing", illustrated by Martin Salvador. It's an hilarious spoof of the late Skywald company's cliché-ridden style of writing, and it works very well.

But the best, as usual, is saved for last; "The Beast Is Yet To Come" is written by Nicola Cuti, and is his usual competent but slightly predictable work; the art, however, is by Carmine Infantino <u>and</u> Alex Nino, and would be worth the price of admission even if the rest of the book was filled with ads. All I can say is that I'm sorry Warren are losing Infantino to Marvel, if this is the kind of work he's producing nowadays... -Howard Stangroom

DR STRANGE ≠23 (June)
"Into the Quadriverse" by Marv
Wolfman, Jim Starlin & Rudy Nebres

Marv's script in this issue is very good --indeed it's everything I had expected it to be. I thought the last page was really superb -- I could almost feel Doc's helplessness, that's how good it was! Marv, you really went out with a bang! What a story to finish on!

Next issue will have Doc in the capable hands of Jim Starlin. I can't say much of his art this time, because, to tell the truth, I can't <u>see</u> much. Only the splash page and backgrounds showed his influence, for Nebres swamped his pencils until they were nowhere to be seen. Next issue, Al Milgrom will do layouts, and Rudy Nebres will finish off (in more ways than one) the art. No doubt there'll be little evidence of Al's work. -Ken Moore

SHADE ≠2 (September)
"The Forms of Destruction" by Steve Ditko, dialogue by Mike Fleisher

I'm not happy about Shade... I really don't see what can be done with the mag. Ditko's art, sad to say, continues to deteriorate; where once it would have been a great asset, now it's a liability. If only he could get the atmosphere of the covers into the interior artwork. Sigh...

And as for the storyline, we've seen it all before--so many times. Even the basics are weak. The hero's powers are vague and ill-defined; the characters are stereotyped; and do we really need yet another alien civilisation taking an interest in Earth? (Answer: No! A thousand times NO!)

It's a shame. I really would like to see Ditko create a new masterpiece... But this isn't it. -K. Williams

OMEGA THE UNKNOWN ≠9 (July)
"Fightin' Fools" by Steve Gerber, Mary Skrenes & Jim Mooney

"Another Off-Beat Saga by Steve Gerber, writer of HOWARD THE DUCK!" quoth the blurb, and, true enough, there is a marked change in the writing. It's quite a good issue; what looks like another one-issue fill-in, with Omega fighting Blockbuster for a reward of $1,000. Ironically, Blockbuster only wants the money to give his kid a good life. It's quite moving in parts, and Mooney's art satisfies, but obviously Steve Gerber intends to wrap up the loose plot ends in the letters page, as this issue does nothing to clarify the relationship between Omega & James-Michael Starling, or why JM's parents were robots, or why they told him to beware the voices, or... -Matthew D. Vaughan

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN ≠7 & ≠8
"Cry Mayhem--Cry Morbius" by Archie Goodwin, Sal Buscema, & Jim Mooney; "And Only One Shall Survive" by Goodwin, Sal Buscema, & Esposito

This is the Morbius two-parter foreshadowed in the previous issue, starring the baneful blood-sucker with a parasitic problem. Archie's scripting is so superior to Len Wein's on the other book, and Sal is far, far better than Ross Andru is at present; Goodwin resists the temptation to write "for the kiddies", unlike Len's contrived characterisations. I have two reservations, though; firstly, Archie's humour stinks (see ≠7 and you'll understand), and secondly, the second episode reads suspiciously like a TEAM-UP story. Still, PP the SS is, without doubt, the best of Spidey's three main monthly showcases. -Barry K. Winetrobe

MARVEL PRESENTS ≠11 (June)
"At War With Arcturus" by Roger Stern, Al Milgrom & Bob Wiacek

I've just learned that this book has been cancelled, and I can't say I'm sorry. After Steve Gerber making this such a good book, Roger Stern has come along and this strip has lost its high quality standard. I'd rather see this book cancelled than have the Guardians strip degraded so badly.

And, similarly, the art is no longer what it once was; Al Milgrom was very good a few issues ago, before Bob Wiacek became inker. Wiacek's inks look very rushed and careless--Terry Austin would be better, I think, going on the work he and Al have done on Captain Marvel. -Ken Moore

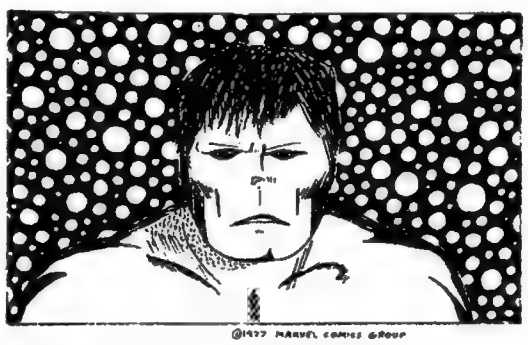
SUPERBOY & THE LEGION ≠230 (August)
"The Creature Who Conned the Legion" by Levitz, Sherman & Abel; "The Day Bouncing Boy Bounced Back" by Levitz, Nasser & Abel

A space octopus called Sden tricks the Legion into giving him the power crystal (which, as Superboy takes it back to the 20th Century at the end, will appear again in Adventure 453) which he needs to control a galaxy--or does he? A nice story, welcome because it features my favourite Legionaire, Element Lad. The title of the second story really says it all! But don't worry, BB is still strictly an honorary Legionaire. Next ish, the mag goes to the 60 cent size! -Laurence Bowkett

SPIDER-MAN ≠170 (July)
"Madness is all in the Mind" by Wein, Andru, Giacoia & Esposito

Yawn! We're off again. Spider-Man sees phantom visions of his old enemies coming through the walls and believes himself to be mad; and then enter Dr Faustus (keeping up Len's policy of bringing back & reviving any old Marvel villains he can possibly remember), who concurs.

This type of plot has been done so many times before in the past by Thomas, Lee, Conway and others that the point of it is becoming totally absurd. Len looks like he's getting fed up writing this, and therefore should hand the scripting over to someone who can put a little punch into it. Now, if Steve Gerber took over we might see something happening. What? He's not available? Too bad. -Jan Garczynski



MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS ≠19
"Robinson Crusoe", adapted from Daniel Defoe's novel by Moench & The Tribe

At last we have some decent adaptations in this title. Defoe's story was quite adaptable to comics, and Doug Moench's talent for putting his own style into even the most dull things shines through here superbly.

People tend to ignore these Classics, for some obscure reason--but there is no reason to. The Tribe offer some interesting artwork, capturing the spirit of the land Crusoe is stranded in. If you've never read the book, read the comic. -JG

SUPERMAN ≠314 (August)
"Before This Night is Over, Superman Will Kill" by Pasko, Swan & Adkins

Supes has his showdown with Amalak in the JLA satellite, and with cameos by Green Lantern, Flash & Supergirl, he finally suppresses the 'journalists disease' that has been raging since 311. Some nice inking by Dapper Dan (oh, I shouldn't use that name now he's at DC, should I?), by far the best replacement for Murphy Anderson yet. And Superman gets as close as he's ever done to revealing his identity and marrying Lois Lane, but... -LB

CREEPY ≠87 (April) - $1.25

This is an "All-Mars Special Issue", taking a last, affectionate look at the myths we humans have built up around the Red Planet. Very soon now, it will have no secrets from us; it will have been weighed, probed, analysed, dissected and explained away...there'll be no more room then for fanciful imaginings such as the War of the Worlds or John Carter.

This, then, is a final tribute to those legends and many others -- and quite a tribute it is, too. Let me make your mouth water with a roll-call of the talents involved: "A Warped Tale" by Al Sirois & Gray Morrow, "A Martian Saga" by Nicola Cuti & Berni Wrightson, "Those 'Orrible Passions of '78" by Bill DuBay & Carmine Infantino, "The Last" by Roger McKenzie & John Severin, "They Come Out At Night" by Bruce Jones & Martin Salvador, and "Warmonger of Mars" by Wally Wood & Ralph Reese. I wouldn't want to spoil any of the surprises in this issue; suffice it to say that the stories range from straight SF, through subtle, black humour, psychological horror, apocalyptic tragedy, and interstellar possession to a delightful spoof of the John Carter genre; and also, most important of all, that all the formidable talents concerned are at their very best. It's a top-quality package in every sense, and if you're unfortunate enough never to have read a Warren before now, this is the one with which to start.
-Howard Stangroom

MEN OF WAR ≠1 (August)
"Code Name: Gravedigger" by David Michelinie, Ed Davis & Romeo Tanghal; Enemy Ace in "Death is a Wild Beast" by Kanigher, Davis & Ortiz

Of course, Enemy Ace without Kubert is rather like..oh...Morecambe without Wise? Starsky without the other fella? Not that Davis & Ortiz don't try hard -- but they don't quite achieve the feel of it. The script of course is by Kanigher, and is pretty much the mixture as before; but, in the case of EA it's a good mixture.

However, the lead feature of MEN OF WAR is "Code Name: Gravedigger", and although it's a bit over-written it shows real promise -- though, to coin a cliché, only time will tell. The art here, by Davis & Romeo Tanghal, does actually seem to have a feel of Kubert about it, unlike the EA back-up; you can feel the strain portrayed in people's faces.

Yes, all in all not a bad start--though I hope to see quite a bit of improvement. And, incidentally, 18 pages of story in this issue! -K. Williams

INHUMANS ≠12 (August)
"A Berserker Called Hulk" by Doug Moench, Keith Pollard & Bob Wiacek

With this issue, INHUMANS goes the way of all good books. The Uncanny Ones tangle with the Incredible One, and come off a bad second. One thing I never realised was that, according to Moench, Black Bolt "in the strength department is an extremely close second" to the Hulk. And I thought he just had a loud voice! Also, there's an interesting Crystal, Pietro sub-plot, and the Pursuer breaks free again. Certainly a lot of plot-threads to be tied up--Capt Marvel is the group's next port of call. Marvel! Stop cancelling your best books, damn you! Sgt Fury will go next! -LB

KATHOLICITY

Among my notes for this column appear the cryptic comments 'Costume -- Word for Williams--Answer April'. Now what the Hell did I mean by that? I should only read Bem when I'm sober. Ah yes, now I remember.

Sorry, boys, I don't really dress like the Black Widow. If I did, the effect would be...would be...indescribable, really.

Put in a word for Williams. "%*@?!" No, seriously, why not give him a column too, Martin? After all he can--well, he's very --just consider his--you've got to admit, that's a great initial he's got there. Anyway, he's right about the American acceptance of the word 'bugger', which seems to be so widespread one can only assume it doesn't mean the same thing there. I came across it once in an Archie comic (blush blush--I can explain this momentary aberration with full extenuating circumstances) and did a classic double-take. It seemed to be used as a term of affection, almost, rather like 'bastard' in Australia.

And answer April. Thus:

Pete's challenged me to write in depth
about
Tarl Cabot, muscle-brained Gorean lout.
I've noticed one quite interesting thing;
He's had Talena, daughter of a king,
Lara, a Tatrix (just whate'er the Hell
That is) and Miss Elizabeth Cardwell,
Vika, Telima and a hundred others--
And none of them have ever become mothers.
The generative power that is Tarl Cabot's
Inferior is to any British rabbits.
(And, lest you all write in with comments
slick
I know quite well this ain't a limerick)

So, even if it is only in a What If, they haven't been able to resist the temptation to have Conan visit the 20th Century. The fact is that, if even Marvel-type reality is to be preserved, the story could only be short and sad. Conan arrives -- sooner or later he finds his way to a city. He is surrounded by weirdly dressed people talking complete gibberish, and they are pointing at him and laughing. He doesn't like this, and lays about him with his sword, his usual way of compelling respect; they can't fight for nuts, and he's winning easily, when he notices a man in blue pointing a long grey thing at him. He never hears the bang as, without time even to think 'Sonja--you never let me...' he dies an ignoble death, unable to take his slayer with him. 'Unidentified Maniac Runs Amok--Police Marksman Has To Shoot'. It won't be like that in What If, of course. No doubt he'll wind up joining the Defenders. I wish they would stick to mucking about their own characters, and not doing things which I can't believe R.E.H. would have liked. By and large I'd rather see stories of the "What If Peter Parker had been bitten by a radio-active body louse" variety. As a matter of fact I would like to see that. Whatever would he call himself?

Captain Frog, eh? I think it's time for -- Captain Scotnat. One day, as Hamish McTumsky was crawling home in the gutter after a night's celebration over the Rangers/Celtic draw (Hamish supports both teams so as to always have a reason for a celebration), he was accosted by the spirits of the Loch Ness Monster, several of the Floars O'The Forest, Mary Queen of Scots, Harry Lauder, and Bruce's Spider. "Haw Jimmy", they said, "It's time somebody sorted oot they Sassenachs, and you are the laddie tae dae it. Choose between this bottle o'whisky and plate o'porridge, and see whit happens." But canny Hamish ate the porridge and drank the whisky. Instantly he became--Captain Scotnat. His kilt, with the hem magically always pointing to his feet so no nosey Sassenach would ever fathom the Great Mystery, was made up of 106 different tartans. His sporran projected a protective force-field which made it impossible to get any money from it. On his chest was written "Devolution Now", and on his back "It's Scotland's Oil". His magic caber could, when tossed, unerringly land itself on the nearest English MP. Shouting his slogan "Och Aye The Noo", Hamish charged off to Westminster to demand Independence Now. What a nice story! Did you believe it? Neither did Hamish's wife, Jeannie (née McHaggis, natch).

I recently learned a bit of trivia which makes me almost look forward to the day when the characters of the different comics companies often meet in joint productions. Specifically, to the day when the JLA transporter goes mad and deposits them on the deck of the USS Enterprise. It seems Mr Spock's human mother was named Amanda Grayson--can it be she's descended from Dick of that ilk? And if so, by whom, since the boy's been showing an unhealthy interest in Batgirl of late? Well, it's a healthy interest really, I suppose--it's certainly healthier than worshipping the Batman. The 'older woman' bit seems to be the latest fad, especially among Marvel's martial artists. Shang-Chi and Iron Fist, both 19, have got to be several years the junior of Leiko Wu and Misty Knight -- especially Leiko, with her chequered past.

I intended at this point to raise the possibility of 'Best of British' including something on the many excellent newspaper strips produced here, and quote the Daily

Mirror ones (I take the Mirror solely because of the quality of the strips it prints) as an example. However, as it happened, my mother, a Royalist she, brought a facsimile of the Daily Mirror of the 1st December 1954 in, one of a series produced to make as much as possible out of the Jubilee--so this is really a then & now comparison. Only one character has survived over the years, this being, rather appropriately, Garth. Not quite at his best in either paper, since one's pre-Bellamy, and one, alas, post-Bellamy; Martin Asbury shows promise, though. So there's Garth, discovering what looks like a typical Lost Empire (all Greek columns and drapery) in 1954 and solving the mystery of the Mary Celeste in 1977--and rippling his muscles throughout. What else had 1954 to offer? The immortal Jane, of course. Her artist was ill that day, however, so there is only a shot of her in bed dreaming up new projects (Whoa there, Edwards -- she is wearing a nightdress--put that newsagent down). Buck Ryan, chasing what probably are going to turn out to be Red spies who have been putting disease-infected fleas in mines and factories. Ruggles, lecturing a J.D. type who's been vandalising a youth club. Belinda, a Little Orphan Annie rip-off right down to the pupil-less eyes, up against a nasty bully at a girl's school. Mr Flutter seems to be selling his wife to a friend -- how permissive! And Romeo Brown. I don't know what kind of strip this was -- I shudder to think. The first panel shows a floating boat, captioned "And so the long night passed", the second a briefly clad girl flaked out on the deck saying to the hero "I'm dead beat, Romeo!" In the immortal words of Wellington of the Perishers, the mind boggles. I don't care what anyone says, I think Perishers are just as good as Peanuts. And besides them and Garth, today's Mirror boasts the sublimely awful Andy Capp, who could give male chauvinism lessons to the Goreans, the surprisingly good 'Mr Men', the Larks, who are out to prove that other characters besides the 'Gasoline Alley' people can age naturally, and who also have a cat that thinks in rhyme yet, and 'The Fosdyke Saga' by the marvelous Bill Tidy. Roger Ditchley, the world's unluckiest villain, has got himself into the clutches of the ghastly Clara Boat, who is now trying to seduce him in a hotel room which they are unfortunately sharing with a ladies' rugby team and a miners' choir. His best bet'd be to send to Private Eye for his co-tidy creation, the Blagdon Amateur Rapist.

On the whole I'm glad I'm alive now, rather than then. At least, I was alive then, but couldn't read so well. My God, I'm giving my age away! Writer's cramp does strange things to a girl.

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

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the column that looks at current trends in comics -- and lives to regret it...

(1) LETTERCOLS

When I first dreamed up this column, the topic I particularly had in mind was lettercols, to be more precise those in the March Marvels. Now, I didn't try Martin with the idea right off, as I suspected he might turn it down; but when eventually I did, and he staggered me by accepting it (even saying he quite liked it--well, he might not have put it quite as strongly as that, he's never exactly fulsome in his praise), it was a trifle too dated for Bem-13, even if there'd been space for it. So, it looked as though the piece would be wasted -- until I had this bright idea of comparing the March lettercols with more recent ones, thereby (hopefully) overcoming the topicality obstacle.

Interesting developments on the lettercol front -- back in the February & March Marvels there seemed to be a distinct touch of the Murray Boltinoffs in the replies (you know: 'So you didn't think that was good enough? Tough titty, the silent majority did, or they wouldn't have bought it...'). Since then, however, I seem to detect a gradual change of attitude...

Take Captain America (Please!)(Sorry..) --back in February the lettercol resounded to howls of anguished protest, but the armadillo-in-charge was smugly sloughing it off with "We feel that most of our readers like Jack's work, whether we're right only time and sales will tell." In March, in response to yet another cry from the heart, immediately followed by a paean of stoutly philistine praise, the reply was "Thank you Chester! Ahem! Now what were you saying Brian?" (You understand of course that one letter of praise automatically outweighs one of criticism...) "It seems that... the Kirby question is forever being answered in different ways. Obviously...we think Jack is doing a great job--because if he wasn't we wouldn't be publishing it." (Like that Prisoner strip he was to have done?) "But, as they say in the lettercol biz, variety is the spice of life. We welcome all opinions..." Sure --if you don't mind being scoffed at for venturing them...

However, since then the complacency has seemed to subside. April's lettercol had this more detailed defence: "As for the discreoancies in Cap's behaviour occasionally, from title to title, you have a valid point. We're always striving to maintain consistency in a constantly burgeoning Marvel Universe, and--sometimes--we mess up. On the other hand let's not forget that none of us is entirely consistent... so there is a certain amount of leeway. Also it's always understood that we're witnessing the exploits of our characters as filtered through the minds of our writers and artists, who have some liberty in orecisely how they choose to detail events." Yeah...well, okay...but, as the letter writers here and elsewhere were saying, <u>none</u> of Kirby's books fit in <u>at all</u> with the rest of the Marvel Universe...Still, a valiant attempt by the armadillo.

Come May and he's ducking out of the 'Kirby Kontroversy' altogether—except for acceding to the requests for the return of (a) Redwing and (b) old villains--with the blurb announcing, in true cop-out style: "Opinions are so diverse on this title that this month we decided to try to squeeze in as many letters as possible".

This retreat from total complacency is only gradual in Cap, but in other mags it is getting quite dramatic now. Power Man 43 springs to mind as a good example of what I mean, with its pleading & cajoling tone. The news that the book has dropped to bimonthly (surprise surprise) may be thought to be foreshadowed in said tone.

And there, of course, is the nub of the matter. As long as a mag's sales seem reasonably secure, the Mighty Marvel (and also DC of course) armadillos aren't too bothered about adverse criticism. If a mag is selling well, the detractors must be just a harmless minority, right? But then if sales start sagging, <u>then</u> the armadillos are suddenly all attentive and eager to be of service. But, of course, by what some might see as poetic justice, by the time they start paying attention, the damage may well have been done--perhaps more to reputation than to sales.

But then, of course, the comics companies don't worry too much about reputation, as long as sales are okay...

...sigh... -KW

THUNDERMOLE
THE FORCES OF EVIL HAVE COMBINED TO ELIMINATE THUNDERMOLE. BUT, IS HE WORRIED?
TERRY MOORE
YOU BETCHA!
QUICK GET ME THE J.L.A
HTD L STD
PHONE BOOTH
FZZZZ
CRUMP
THANK GOD FOR THE JUSTICE LEG OF ALVECHURCH!
NOW, HOW CAN I GET RID OF THE JLA?

MADE IN BRITAIN

It will soon be five years since Marvel started producing their own British weekly comics. MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL ≠1 had the cover-date October 7th, 1972; it featured "The Coming of the Hulk", the origin of "The Fantastic Four", and the very first adventure of "Spider-Man" -- 40 pages in all, mainly in black, green & white, with even some pages in full colour; the free gift was a Hulk T-shirt transfer. That's a pretty valuable reprint package for a mere 5p! Since then, other titles have come -- and a number have vanished again. The shortest run ever was for THE SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN, which lasted 18 weeks, to then be swallowed by THE AVENGERS, the longest-running title to be stopped, which managed to reach ≠148; DRACULA LIVES and PLANET OF THE APES started together, but DL, after ≠87, was amalgamated into POTA, which itself reached ≠123. THE SUPERHEROES finished neatly with ≠50, so that SPIDER-MAN COMICS WEEKLY became, with ≠158, SUPER SPIDER-MAN WITH THE SUPER-HEROES, in the wide "landscape" format; the other "landscape" book, THE TITANS, lasted 58 issues before joining the web-slinger in SUPER SPIDER-MAN AND THE TITANS with ≠199.

Today, we're left with four comics. The latest set to hand as I write are dated "week ending June 8", so, for those of you who've the time and money to stick to the American editions, let's examine their contents. The number in brackets refers to the issue of the US comic the story is reprinted from. FURY ≠13 has a pair of 5-page non-series war tales, plus Sgt Fury (8) and Cap Savage (8); SUPER SPIDER-MAN 226 has, logically enough, Spider-Man (163), Cap America (123), Iron Man (33), Thor (209), Invaders (13), and Avengers (115); MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL 245 contains Hulk (203), Planet of the Apes (29), Cap Marvel (35), and Daredevil (81); and, in addition to the 7-page new story, CAPTAIN BRITAIN ≠35 has the Fantastic Four (126), SHIELD (5), and Marvel Team-Up (12).

Two of those series are reprinting 1977 stories--so it comes as no surprise that they're ending. MWOM ≠246 will have the final half of the very last Apes saga; and the Invaders series is ending, as the switch of SUPER SPIDER-MAN to the more conventional "upright" shape (with ≠229) will give a distinct space shortage. At the moment it squeezes in around 53 pages of story--MWOM and CB only manage 29.

The Spider-Man story reprinted is from December 1976, and the Hulk adventure from September-- but Marvel can easily switch to Peter Parker and the Defenders.

But what about that new story, starring Captain Britain in 7 pages per week of glowing black & white, by Gary Friedrich, Ron Wilson, Bob Budiansky, & editor Larry Lieber, aided on this accasion by Tom Palmer once again? Standard superhero fare at present, with the background to CB's origin being filled in by Merlin & Roma, the pair Behind It All--how does Merlin's account of King Arthur's court fit in with the Black Knight story in MARVEL SUPER-HEROES ≠17? Rather poorly. But maybe the sorcerer lies; he could be not Merlin--but Modred the Evil...?

Len Wein, later than expected, is to take over the scripting very soon now.

Things happen quickly in British Weeklies, so it's difficult to have any news that will still be news in a few weeks time, when Bem comes out. I spoke to Nick Landau, honestly employed now as sub-editor on ACTION and 2000 AD, and learnt a little about the future plans for the latter comic, fast getting itself a reputation as the only weekly (with the possible exception of the Marvel quartet) that most fans of US comics will admit to reading. I expect "Flesh" has ended by the time you read this, and a polar bear named "Shaka" is making us all shiver in our boots; but how about the re-vamping of "Harlem's Heroes"? The most intriguing news was of a team-up between Dan Dare & Judge Dredd. As long as we continue to see art by people like Dave Gibbons, Brian "Bollo" Bolland, and Kev O'Neill, IPC's SF comic will be riding high in my book; congratulations to Joe Matthews too, for getting an illo printed in issue 13...

Following on from "Rivals of Dracula" and "Rivals of Frankenstein", following "Rivals of King Kong", Corgi's to bring out a "The Rivals Of Superman" book to tie in with the release of the film. They are still in search of some suitable tales -- they can be humorous, with parodies of any heroes, etc, or straight, but must feature DC or Marvel type superheroes. I think I'll type up a submission or two (double spaced, with return postage -- send 'em to Michel Parry, 137 Windmill Rd, Brentford, Middx) -- and my machine won't be the only one in fandom tip-tapping away, I bet! This information came, via Kathleen Glancy, courtesy of the worthy British Fantasy Society (for lovers of all kinds of fantasy from HTD to REH) -- send an s.a.e. to Brian Mooney, 447A, Porters Ave, Dagenham, Essex for details.

Let's see; a new BRAINSTORM is due soon, which is something to look forward to; I think a new HOUSE OF HAMMER is out now, but the latest I've got is ≠8, which can be summed up in two words -- either "John Bolton" or "Get It"! His "Father Shandor" strip may only be 6 pages long, but that is better than 18 of most other artists.

There are some nice ads around now, by the way -- have you seen Ron Embledon's fine full-colour rendering of an awfully true-to-life shoe shop, in the same style as his "Wicked Wanda" work. And have you still got the "Jubilee Souvenir" issue of Radio Times (4-10 June)? There's more art than usual, including the ever-impeccable Eric Fraser.

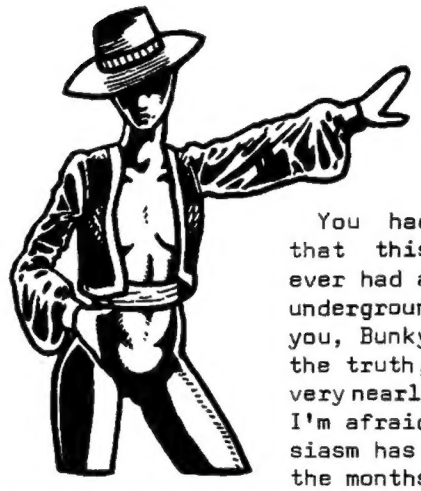
Next time, I may need a new title for this column, as I firmly intend to deal with France's answer to Superman--Asterix the Gaul!

-RUAN LANIHORNE

COMIX COMMENTS

by

HENRY SANDWICH



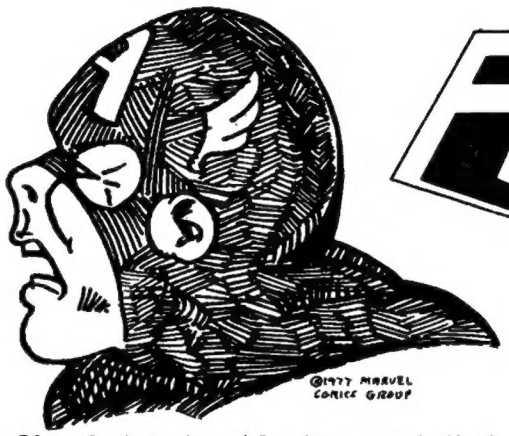
You had forgotten that this magazine ever had a column on undergrounds, hadn't you, Bunky? To tell the truth, so had I, very nearly--my fault I'm afraid, my enthusiasm has waned over the months, and there seems so little new stuff of any merit coming into the country now. Obviously a new viewpoint is needed; after this time around I graciously step down, and a more active enthusiast of alternative comix, Mr Al Matheson of Komix Plus, takes over.

I imagine he'll give emphasis to the u/g revival in this country being lead by Alchemy's BRAINSTORM and the various comix put out by the Birmingham Arts Lab, so I'll just keep to the few American comix that have come my way lately; first, TWO FOOLS by Ted Richards and Willy Murphy, published by Industrial Reality at $1.00 --whatever happened to 50c, or even 75c, comix? Sadly, Willy Murphy died a year ago, from viral pneumonia, so only "Two Fools Discover Pizza", "Fools Gold", "How the Mona Lisa Got Her Smile", "The Battle of Chicken Pock Peak", & "Menage à Trois" are by this team; some of the shorter pieces, including a four-page explanatory strip, are by Richards alone, while "2001 Fools Journey to Planet Y" is co-created by J. Michael Leonard. The Fools owe a debt to Laurel & Hardy, though of course they're blunt, to-the-point underground fare; they're losers in any setting from prehistory to tomorrow, the sort of low-lifes that earthquakes happen to; isn't it nice to have characters one can feel superior to? A good collection.

DR WIRTHAM'S COMIX & STORIES is a one-man show by Oisif Eguax, who demonstrates an interesting art style, and a decidedly peculiar country of the mind. It's "the stuff Dr Wirtham (sick) loved to hate"--one-man comix are always heavy stuff, and this certainly is.

But, how can anything else compare with Genius? Jack Katz used to work for the ordinary comics, including Skywald, yet; but then he got the vision. Write, draw, and have published a 768 page epic of a hero, a people, a race and their gods! Create it from whole cloth -- take plenty of time. Put out a 32-page instalment every six months, with dazzling, detailed, inspired artwork--it'll only take twelve years. Comparisons? Prince Valiant? Lord of the Rings? Trigan Empire? Conan? No, Jack Katz is a true original. Book Five is out now, and at last the child who will be the hero comes into the story--that's the scale things are working on, he was only born last time. Keep them coming to us, "Comics & Comix"--it'll be a tragedy if this engrossing, enthralling saga is cut short. Another nine years to go? It will be worth every day of it!

That proves I can still get enthusiastic given enough cause -- but now I fade back into the silent majority. 'Bye, Bemlets.



FAN-THINGS

I'm glad to be able to report that, in response to Barry Winetrobe's proposals in last issue's lettercol, Nigel Balloch is starting an organisation to be called THE SOCIETY OF COMICS ENTHUSIASTS. The annual membership dues are to be £2.40, which will bring you a monthly magazine (with news, columns, art etc), a cheap import service, "Comic Marts" with the emphasis not on dealers tables, a comics exchange service, and other projects. If you want more details, send Nigel a 7p stamp--

or phone him between 6 and 8 o'clock on Mondays or Tuesdays.

Make that 12p (7p + 5p stamps) and you should get a copy of his fanzine KA-POW ≠2, too! Nigel is aiming at a membership of 500 for TSOCE, so he needs you in among them. For my cannier readers, I'll add that Nigel is a known fan with his own fanzine, and has had letters published in Bem and elsewhere -- our egregious editor knows him, even!

Next, good news for all letter writers; Mat Coward and a friend are planning to put out a letterzine, and are in need of letters to fill the first ish. Any topics of interest to fans can be covered, such as comics, SF, fantasy, politics (?), art, life, and fandom.

to reserve a copy of whatever they're going to call it, send Mat 22p.

I needn't spend too much time on these next two zines, as I previewed them last time: ELIPSE 29p from Phil Elliott,

has in its 24 pages some excellently drawn strips by Phil, David Jackson (very much in the Bellamy tradition), Dave Byrom (a bit different from his work in the middle of this page!), and others; KIDZ STUFF ≠1 38p or 4 for £1 from Hunter Tremayne,

which has everything promised (except "Man-Elf"), plus Guy Lawley. The standard of production is in the litho CU class.

Well, whatever did happen to CU? The answer is that it's now THE NEW COMICS UNLIMITED, pledged to appear monthly once again--returning to its original concept it's now an adzine. An average of 40 pages with 2000 circulation? Sounds like a good deal, at only £2 for twelve issues, with a full page ad only £12 -- the address to send your money to is Fantasy Unlimited, 47, Hesperus Crescent, Millwall, London E14 9AB, and don't worry, I'm sure all the old regular columns like "Fox On The Run", "We Want Information", and "The Worlds Of Emlock" will be on hand too.

Is YANCY STREET JOURNAL "Britain's Leading Comics Fanzine"? Howard Stangroom doesn't seem sure, as some copies of YSJ ≠3 say it is in a blurb on the cover, and some don't. A good meaty article on the Secret Six, a group created by E. Nid Bly --oops, E. Nelson Bridwell, by K. Williams is the main feature, supported by "Power of Emlock" and "Of Swamps, Men & Things" by Alan McKenzie. Some of the strips have said all they have to say now; a straight-forward super-hero adventure strip like Dave Edge's (forthcoming) "Successors" may be just what's needed. A good issue, generally, of a steadily improving zine; 50p by post from P.J. Evans.

ONE DAY IN SUPERMAN'S FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE.
I'LL JUST GO FEED THE YILLIBREESH, HELP YOURSELF TO A DRINK, BATMAN.
NOW, WHERE DOES HE KEEP THE BOOZE? AHH.... HERE'S A BOTTLE...
OH, MY GOD!!! YOU'VE DRUNK THE CITY OF KANDOR!!
SORRY... ...BURP!
EDWARDS/ Byrom 77.
SUPERMAN AND BATMAN ARE ©1977 DC COMICS INC

A SHORT STOP AT THE TRANSYLVANIAN BRAIN SURGERY (or, for short, TBS) ≠5 is now out--with a full-colour cover & 32 pages for 35p from George Barnett.

George & Gray are continuing their most embarrassing habit of offering more for less than any other zines are able to. A Stan Lee interview by Ian Penman is the main comics-fan attraction, supported by a Superman article by Paul Kirton, Nige Edwards on "Cosmic Beach Bum" the Silver Surfer, and the conclusion of "The Devil Riders" (strip) by Philip Ruffell; the SF side of the audience have a Philip K. Dick critique and three short stories. Sadly, this is the final issue, as TBS is joining "Cauldron of Fear" (but not Weird Trash) as part of PANELOLOGIST. That should help "Panny" to appear regularly, much to the benefit of everyone except the publishers of "rivals" like CMN, Bem, and sundry SF fanzines. The most interesting bit, apart from Rob Moran's fine colour back cover, was the editorial explanation for TBS ≠5 being 18 months or so late; tell us more about those "demanding females" who kept you too busy for TBS, Gray!

The dates of the next main Comic Marts in London have been changed --they're back on Sundays in a new location, The Royal Horticultural Society's Old Hall in Vincent Square, Victoria. The dates are July 31, October 2, and November 20--admission free. The main Comic Convention, COMICON 77, is still on September 3 & 4 at the Bloomsbury Centre Hotel in Coram Street, WC1, the Lyndhurst Hall Comicbook Marketplaces on October 15 and December 17, and the Birmingham Marts on August 13 and November 12 at Birmingham Centre Hotel, New Street. If all those don't keep your wallet slender, you're just incurably wealthy!

CREATION ≠1, as mentioned last time, is out now for a 5p coin and a 7p stamp from Joe Matthews

--nice art by Joe himself, Alan Hunter, Phil Elliott, Steve Harris, and John Matthews, plus a page of reviews by K. "Kut-throat" Williams.

FANTASY TRADER ≠25 may not look much from outside, but at least Mike Cruden has resisted the temptation to do a Silver Jubilee special issue to tie in with FT's quarter century! Pete Scott spotlights Mr Jonah Hex; lots of nice ads; an 8-page letter column. More we should want for 17p, from Mike.

If you have read Reaction, you'll know ≠3 of COMIXINE is sold out -- you had your chance last issue! Too bad, it was an excellent zine -- to avoid trouble in future, send 30p for the next Marc Baines publication, GRAPH ART FREEK MAG, due out in September,

it will be devoted to art and artists, with Hunt Emerson interviewed, appreciations of Corben, Steranko, and others, strips and art by Szostek, Lawley etc, and a review section. Sounds good!

Mention of Hunt Emerson reminds me that KAK '77 is definitely on for July 30 & 31 --this is the second annual Konvention of Alternative Komix, and details can be had from I'd say more, but that's all I know, I'm afraid.

WHIZ KIDS ≠1, for fans of the original Captain Marvel, is a transatlantic co-production, edited & published by John Pierce & Alan Austin -- if you're at all interested in Cap, send 25p to Fantasy Unlimited. I expect they'll be agents for BATMANIA ≠22; a "Brave & Bold" issue with also a Gardner Fox interview, it has lots of art by a certain British fan artist. They sent us Hamburgers, Jeans, the Bionic Woman, non-stick pans, Cap Britain, and Kojak--and we send them Superswipe art?

Which sounds a suitable point to end on; next time you're hesitating over some fanzine in Dark They Were & Golden Eyed, buy it, okay? I may be the fella looking over your shoulder! -ED SALLIS